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**Female community college presidents:
Sharing stories of first-year experiences**

by

Darla A. Nibbelink Struck

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

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2013

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To my children, Alex and Alisanne

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ABSTRACT

As more females enter administrative positions in the field of education, the significance of females assuming presidency positions increases. With many administrators nearing retirement in the community college system, leadership opportunities for females will become more readily available.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to share the stories of female midwestern community college presidents from their first year in that leadership position. A total of five participants were interviewed using a series of semistructured interviews. The four research questions were: (1) How do female community college presidents describe their pathways to a presidency position? (2) How do female community college presidents view prior training, mentoring, and educational opportunities that led to successful experiences during the first year as a community college president? (3) How do female community college presidents view their experiences during their first year in that position? (4) How do female community college presidents explain any voids or deficiencies in their career pathway that made achieving success during their first year more challenging?

Through narrative analysis, each participant's unique stories led to the development of multiple themes for each research question. These themes offer words of wisdom for other females aspiring to leadership positions. The findings of this study contribute to the current body of knowledge about females in leadership positions in community colleges.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

With many administrators in the community college system nearing retirement, leadership in these institutions of higher education is an important topic (Levin, 1998; Weisman & Vaughan, 2006). According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC; Tekle, 2012), 75 percent of the respondents were planning to retire within the next 10 years and an additional 15 percent were planning to retire in the next 11 to 15 years. Many of the college presidents and senior level administrators who began their careers in the 1960s and 1970s are almost at the end of their careers. Due to these increasing numbers of retirements, AACC added leadership development as a strategic action area in its mission statement: “Retirements and changes in community colleges have created an urgency for developing future leaders” (AACC, 2001, p. 2). A challenge for current community college leaders will be to prepare and train individuals with the necessary skills and tools to effectively lead and grow their institutions.

As more females enter administrative positions in the field of education, the significance of females assuming presidency positions in the community college system increases. With the need for new leaders continuing to increase, females will have more opportunities in the near future to step into the role of president. According to Weisman and Vaughan (2006), 84 percent of current presidents were planning to retire in the following 10 years. This is an increase from the study Weisman and Vaughan conducted in 2002 which found that 79 percent of the presidents surveyed planned to retire.

The median age of respondents in the 2012 AACC study (Tekle, 2012) was 60 years, with approximately 50 percent of the respondents between 55 and 64 years of age. Another 23 percent of the respondents were between 65 and 76 years of age. This compares with data

Duree (2007) reported; the average age of current community college presidents in his study was 58 years, and 90 percent of the presidents surveyed were between 50 and 69 years old. These figures remain somewhat consistent with the studies of Weisman and Vaughan (2006). However, Weisman and Vaughan's (2006) statistics showed the average age of a community college president creeping upward. In 1984, the average age of a president was 51 years; in 1996, the average age of a president was 54 years; and in 2001, the average of a president was 56 years (Weisman & Vaughan, 2006). Again, these statistics indicate the leadership need will continue to increase, while the number of individuals preparing to step into these leadership roles continues to decline (AACC, 2001).

At present, women make up 51 percent of the U.S. population and continue to earn more degrees than do men—about 58 percent of all degrees awarded in the academic year 2002–03. Women represent 61 percent of enrollments in community colleges (American Council on Education [ACE], 2007). However, women held 32 percent of the community college presidencies (Duree, 2007). This compares to all institutions of higher education, where women held 26 percent of the presidencies, according to the 2012 American Council on Education (ACE) report. ACE's 2007 report indicated that the number of presidencies held by women more than doubled during the previous 20 years (from 9.5 percent in 1986 to 23 percent in 2006), but the rate of increase has slowed considerably since the mid-1990s. If community colleges continue to serve a diverse population of students, leadership should reflect this diversity. As students are encouraged to build social and emotional capital, administrators, faculty, and staff need to represent all demographics within this student body (Rendón, 1999).

A study of female community college presidents reflecting back on their first year in that position could prove beneficial to other females aspiring to similar careers. Personal narratives about the success strategies, hurdles, obstacles, and training opportunities would add to the body of knowledge surrounding female presidencies. The power of personal narratives was emphasized by Noel Tichy (1997), who said, “Winning leaders personalize their vision and ideas by telling stories that touch people’s emotions as well as their intellects. They drive their messages home with words and actions that engage and excite followers” (p. 21). Tichy summarized by saying that effective leaders are in touch with their own stories and are able to use their own stories as tools for effective leadership. Not only would prospective females be interested in the narratives in this study, but also current community college administrative leaders looking to develop leadership skills in internal female staff members should be interested.

As the current retirement movement in America’s educational system continues to follow the trends described in the current research (AACC, 2001; ACE, 2007; Duree, 2007; Tekle, 2012; Weisman & Vaughan, 2006), many leaders need to prepare for leadership positions in the coming years. These potential leaders need to be educated and trained in a timely fashion in order to fill the void that will be left vacant due to retirements. Female community college presidents have been studied in the past (Ebberts, Gallisath, Rockel, & Cohan, 2000; Eddy, 2005, 2010; Shaffer Lilienthal, 2009; Stubbe, 2008); however, much can still be learned by focusing on the individual experiences of females in their first year of presidency. As more presidential opportunities become available for females in the community college, these aspiring women need role models from whom they can learn as they explore leadership positions in academia.

In a study conducted of community college administrators in California, Faulconer (1995) said that women are not represented proportionately in employment positions compared to the student demographics. The presence of women in management positions is necessary if female students are expected to follow mentors and leaders with whom they can relate. If women are unable to view other women filling these roles, the vision of opportunities does not exist. Students and staff members both need to follow and model women in positions of leadership in academic institutions.

Statement of Problem

Although the percentage of female community college presidents has increased over the past years, this number is still low in comparison to the percentage of female students attending community colleges. As stated earlier, women represent 57 percent of enrollments in community colleges (Tekle, 2012) and held 32 percent of the community college presidencies according to Duree (2007). The 2007 ACE report indicated that the number of presidencies held by women more than doubled during the previous 20 years (from 9.5 percent in 1986 to 23 percent in 2006), but the rate of increase has slowed considerably since the mid-1990s. The 2012 ACE report showed that 26 percent of presidencies were held by women. More specifically to community colleges, in 1986 a total of 8 percent of the presidents were female, with this number increasing to 29% in the following 20 years (ACE, 2007). In 2011, 33 percent of community college presidencies were held by women (ACE, 2012).

Duree (2007) reported similar results from his study. Findings indicated that the number of female community college presidents did increase slightly; however, not by the dramatic numbers shown in earlier years. He stated,

If the nation's community colleges are to embrace diversity and continue to take pride in their claims to be the "open-door" institutions of the higher education community, then trustee boards should not be satisfied with a ratio of approximately two male presidents to every one female. (p. 109)

Questions arise surrounding the factors of what pathways females take to assume the presidency and how their stories can assist other females who aspire to similar positions. One way to expand the body of knowledge surrounding the female community college presidential experience is to study the stories of women who have recently assumed these positions. Their stories and experiences will offer insight to aspiring female community college presidents, as they need role models from whom they can learn as they explore top leadership positions in academia.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the first-year experiences of female community college presidents and how they arrived at their current position. The participants were within the first five years in this position so as to offer a retrospective look at the first year. How they arrived at the presidency, experiences leading up to the presidency, reflections on the first year in the presidency, and what additional training and experiences would have been beneficial are all areas explored in this study. A constructionist epistemology was the framework for this study. This constructionism allowed me to show how participants continually seek to construct reality out of life experiences. A basic interpretive theoretical framework was used for the study to illustrate how people seek meaning and understanding of their social world. In addition, a feminist theoretical framework also was employed. Through the methodology of narrative analysis, each

participant's personal stories shared her lived experiences. A series of semistructured interviews were conducted with each participant to fully explore her first-year experiences. The focus of this study was on females in midwestern community colleges who were residing in the states of Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. These midwestern states were chosen because of institutional similarities such as size, location, and structure. Similarities in governance structure, including board systems and how they operate, also were considered. Proximity was another consideration, as a personal connection with each participant was deemed important.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. How do female community college presidents describe their pathways to a presidency position?
2. How do female community college presidents view prior training, mentoring, and educational opportunities that led to successful experiences during the first year as a community college president?
3. How do female community college presidents view their experiences during their first year in that position?
4. How do female community college presidents explain any voids or deficiencies in their career pathway that made achieving success during their first year more challenging?

Significance

As more females enter administrative positions in the community college system, the significance of this issue increases, not only to increase the number of people in the

leadership pipeline, but also to ensure that the diversity of community college student demographics is represented within the administrative structures of these same institutions. This study will contribute to the current literature on the experiences of women serving as community college presidents by providing leadership stories on successes, hurdles, and obstacles in the first year of that position and the career pathways prior to assuming the presidency. According to Amey (1999), “the perceived impact of gender in male-dominated organizations is seen as most prevalent, most isolating, and most difficult to overcome” (p. 68). Therefore, women who aspire to obtain upper-level administrative positions in community colleges, or other institutions of high education, can benefit from reading about shared experiences of leadership stories. Polkinghorne (1996) stated that stories, often referred to as narrative data, “provide researchers with the richest and thickest source for explicating their subjects’ understanding of their own lives” (p. 92). Furthermore, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) said that “humans are storytelling organisms who individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience their world” (p. 2).

The stories shared by female community college presidents in this study can offer advice, suggestions, and recommendations for success to other females who are considering or aspiring to the role of president. The intent of this study was to enhance the views of the community college presidency by studying experiences of women presidents.

Delimitations

This study included five female participants who were currently serving in the position of a community college president. Participants had completed a minimum of one year in the presidency and currently had spent between two and five years in the position of

president. This was to ensure they were able to reflect back on the lived experiences of the first year. Midwest community colleges from the following states were included as participants were selected for the study: Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota

Organization of Dissertation

This chapter provided an introduction, problem statement, purpose, research questions, significance, theoretical perspectives, and delimitations of the study. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature regarding leadership by females in community colleges. Chapter 3 provides the epistemological framework, theoretical foundation, methodology, design, and methods of the study. Chapter 4 provides the findings from the study, and Chapter 5 provides implications of the study and recommendations for future research.

Reflexivity Statement

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) emphasized the need for a reflexivity statement to help establish the researcher's own personal biases and historical influences that could impact the data being gathered. My personal and professional background is in the education field. I have worked as a K–12 music and English teacher, a middle and high school substitute teacher, and an adjunct instructor at a community college. Currently, I am the director of several community college branch campuses and in a leadership role within the community college system. I was not employed at any of the institutions involved with this study.

My professional background also includes experience in publishing with years as an editor/interviewer for newsletters in the fields of education and fundraising. In addition, I have worked for newspapers and covered the field of education.

Throughout my years in the field of education, I have benefitted from professional growth and training opportunities. I attended the Midwest Leadership Academy and the LINC (Leadership Institute for a New Century) program through Iowa State University. These programs have allowed me to observe successful leaders in all aspects of education. My doctoral journey also has provided opportunities to befriend many knowledgeable, successful leaders in the educational realm. Each person has impacted who I am and the person I aspire to become.

I acknowledge that my professional background would lead me to strongly support females moving into administrative positions in education. I see this as an exciting era for females within the education field. Roles and responsibilities are changing at an incredible pace, and new opportunities are increasing.

The words of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) have come to my mind often throughout this doctoral journey I have undertaken: “We are in the parade we presume to study” (p. 81). Although there are some similarities between my life and the lives of the participants, the “parade” was different enough for me to remain objective.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many researchers have noted that presidents, long-term senior administrators, and faculty are considering retirement. According to Barwick (2002), “we are at the brink of crisis because presidents will be retiring faster than the available applicant pool can fill the vacancies” (p. 6). If this pattern continues, the nation will experience a leadership shortage.

When looking specifically at community colleges, Shults’s (2001) findings included that 45 percent of current presidents were planning to retire by 2007, that community college presidents were getting older with an average age of 51 years in 1986 increasing to 57 years of age in 1998, and that the majority of CEOs in community colleges were still male and Caucasian. This profile is changing somewhat in regard to gender. In 1986, 7.9 percent of community college presidents were female, and by 1998, the percentage had increased to 22.3 percent. According to AACC (Tekle, 2012), 75 percent of the respondents were planning to retire within the following 10 years and an additional 15 percent were planning to retire in the following 11–15 years

According to ACE (2007), the percentage of college presidents in the United States that are women more than doubled, from 10 percent in 1986 to 23 percent in 2006; however, women’s progress has slowed in recent years. In 2011, 26 percent of presidencies were held by women (ACE, 2012). ACE (2012) also reported that the average age of presidents increased from 52 years in 1986 to 61 years in 2006. In addition, the proportion of presidents who were 61 years of age or older grew from 14 percent in 1986 to 49 percent in 2006, again illustrating the trend of aging leadership. If approximately half of these individuals would choose to retire in the upcoming five years, one quarter of presidential positions would need new leaders. Although challenges to fill these positions will be felt, according to Boggs

(2003), these very challenges open “a window of opportunity to bring greater diversity, new energy, and new ideas to community college faculty and leadership” (p. 15).

A study conducted by Weisman and Vaughn (2006) indicated similar results. The authors reported that 79 percent of community college presidents intended to retire by 2012, and more recently, 84 percent indicated that they would retire by 2016. Duree (2007) reported similar results from his study, which indicated that the increase of female community college presidents did increase slightly; however, not the dramatic numbers shown in earlier years. He stated, “If the nation’s community colleges are to embrace diversity and continue to take pride in their claims to be the ‘open-door’ institutions of the higher education community, then trustee boards should not be satisfied with a ratio of approximately two male presidents to every one female” (Duree, 2007, p. 109).

Theoretical Perspectives

Because this study focused on females in the role of community college presidents, a feminist theoretical perspective was used. Esterberg (2002) stated that feminist social science research includes a wide range of thoughts and techniques:

Although some feminist scholars may take a more liberal approach and others a more radical one, what they share is a sense that social science as traditionally conducted does not fully take into account the presence of women in social life and the range of women’s concerns. (p. 18)

The focus feminist scholars do share is the need to make women the focus of research studies and challenge the traditional theoretical frameworks. According to Broido and Manning (2002), the feminist theory is based on the assumption that gender is socially constructed and

a changing reality. Research using this theory is defined by questions originating from a woman's perspective and conducted by a woman.

Women were described by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule (1986) as having the ability to construct knowledge for themselves. Constructivist women act both out of conviction and "out of a feeling of responsibility to the larger community in which they live" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 150). The authors also stated that the type of work and the connections a woman makes between her work and a life of commitment are important, adding:

Constructivist women aspire to work that contributes to the empowerment and improvement in the quality of life of others. . . . They reveal in the way they speak and live their lives their moral conviction that ideas and values, like children, must be nurtured, cared for, placed in environments that help them grow. (p. 152)

The research questions in this study addressed the females' lived experiences and shared their stories of reflection on their first year in the position as a community college president. Bloom's (1998) feminist concepts served as a framework. Bloom (1998) described five pertinent issues of feminist methodology, as shown below.

1. The social construction of gender. According to Bloom (1998), "using gender as the primary analytic category is to account for and overturn patriarchal domination in order to create social change" (p. 139). With the focus of this study being on females' experiences, those experiences will be maximized instead of being left out.
2. The study of women's diverse lives and personal narratives. This concept requires researchers to focus on listening to the differing stories from women. This will

ensure that females are not universalized or stereotyped. The participants of this study shared their personal narratives, which illustrate how they viewed leadership experiences and made meaning out of lived experiences.

3. The contexts of the research questions. Feminist research must focus on the questions women have about their lives as opposed to the questions men have about their lives. “When the inquiry focus of the research is derived from the vantage point of women’s perspectives on their own lives, the research questions that emerge may be different” (Bloom, 1998, p. 147). For this study, I framed questions from a feminist perspective and shared the collected stories told from a female point of view.
4. The critical self-reflections of the researcher. Positionality of the researcher is a key factor in qualitative research. This requires the researcher to understand her own position and how that could impact the data gathered. Bloom (1998) said, “The real task for researchers in self-reflection is to take responsibility for our identities, particularly by learning how we are related in society to others” (p. 149).
5. Feminist research relationships. Researchers need to exercise caution when believing in total identification as opposed to a more beneficial partial identification with participants in the study. “In feminist methodology there is a belief that a researcher’s identification with her respondents or biographical subjects enhances the researcher’s interpretive abilities, rather than jeopardizes validity” (Bloom, 1998, p. 151). Through this study, I developed some form of personal connection with each participant; however, I have no expectations for relationships to continue beyond the scope of the data collection.

Overview of Leadership

Leadership is a multi-faceted concept. Every leader will define leadership with different terms and phrases. Maxwell and Dornan (1997) stated that leaders are defined by the simple fact that others choose to follow them. Although the theory of transformational leadership was developed outside of education, educational leaders face similar challenges as do leaders in business and industry. A transformational leader must be able to combine change and a purpose that acknowledges the needs, values, and goals of the group. A leader must be able to engage followers. Then, both must work together to make appropriate and effective change. A transformational leader is a source of inspiration to followers as each follower is afforded individual consideration (Burns, 1978).

Transformational leadership occurs, according to Kouzes and Posner (2002) when, in their interactions, people raise one another to “higher levels of motivation and morality. . . . Transforming leadership ultimately became moral in that it raised the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both the leader and the led, and thus it had a transforming effect on both” (p. 153). Kouzes and Posner (1987) developed five practices of exemplary leadership, namely:

1. Modeling the way. Set the example and plan small wins.
2. Inspiring a shared vision. Envision the future and actively encourage others to do the same.
3. Challenging the process. Search for opportunities, take risks, and learn from mistakes.
4. Enabling others to act. Foster collaboration and strengthen others.

5. Encouraging others to act. Recognize contributions and celebrate victories. (pp. 310–311)

These five practices were later developed into the Leadership Practices Inventory, which identifies practices and behaviors associated with effective leadership. This inventory measures personal and organization progress in leadership development (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

Roueche, Baker, and Rose (1989) defined transformational leadership in the community college as “the ability of the community college CEO to influence the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of others by working with and through them in order to accomplish the college’s mission and purpose” (p. 11). In order to explain this definition further, five themes were developed as a result of interviews with 50 community college CEOs, including both males and females. These interviewees were identified by their peers as the “very best leaders they knew” (Roueche et al., 1989, p. 12). The five themes of transformational leaders included the following:

- Influence. They believe in teamwork and shared decision-making. They have a bias for action, and they empower others to act. They try to develop a collaborative situation that is not dependent on any one individual for success.
- People orientation. They value people, both as members of the team and as individuals. They respect individual differences and value the opinions of others. They reward work well done. Students are a focal point of their efforts.
- Motivation. They understand motivation. They have high expectations of others and inspire them to develop their creative and problem-solving skills.

- Values. They have a strong personal value system. They value consistency, integrity, commitment to student learning, and openness. They model the conduct they expect of others.
- Vision. They have a vision of what their college can become. They are willing to take risks and commit their colleges to new directions that incorporate the needs of their communities. (Roueche et al., 1989, pp. 12–13)

In order to assist in defining leadership, the AACC developed a document identifying a set of six competencies to be used for leadership development. The AACC Board of Directors approved a document in April 2005. The six competencies identified as being attributes of an effective community college leader include: organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism (AACC, 2005, pp. 4–6).

A leader with competency in organizational strategy was identified as one who “improves the quality of the institution, protects the long-term health of the organization, promotes the success of all students, and sustains the community college mission, based on knowledge of the organization, its environment, and future trends” (AACC, 2005, p. 4). A leader with competency in resource management was identified as one who is “equitable and ethically sustains people, processes, and information as well as physical and financial assets to fulfill the mission, vision, and goals of the community college” AACC, 2005, (p. 4). A leader competent in communicating was identified as one who “uses clear listening, speaking, and writing skills to engage in honest, open dialogue at all levels of the college and its surrounding community, to promote the success of all students, and to sustain the community college mission” (AACC, 2005, p. 5). A competent collaborative leader was

identified as one who “develops and maintains responsive, cooperative, mutually beneficial, and ethical internal and external relationships that nurture diversity, promote the success of all students, and sustain the community college mission” (AACC, 2005, p. 5). A community college leader competent in advocacy was identified as one who “understands, commits to, and advocates for the mission, vision, and goals of the community college” (AACC, 2005, p. 6). Finally, a community college leader exhibiting professionalism was identified as one who “works ethically to set high standards for self and others, continuously improves self and surroundings, demonstrates accountability to and for the institution, and ensures the long-term viability of the college and community” (AACC, 2005, p. 6).

In the fall of 2004, AACC designed a survey to review these competencies, and of the 125 surveys sent out electronically, 95 were returned. A unanimous 100 percent of the respondents noted all six of the competencies were either “very” or “extremely” essential to a successful community college leader (AACC, 2005).

In order to facilitate the stated AACC competencies, the following principles were to be applied:

- Leadership can be learned.
- Many members of the community college can lead.
- Effective leadership is a combination of effective management and vision.
- Learning leadership is a lifelong process, the movement of which is influenced by personal and career maturity as well as other developmental processes.
- The leadership gap can be addressed through a variety of strategies such as college grow-you-own programs, AACC council and university programs, state system

programs, residential institutes, coaching, mentoring, and on-line and blended approaches.

In addition to these competencies and principles, Shults (2001) noted the leadership skills necessary for success. These skills included being able to bring a college together through the governance process, mediation skills, technological skills, and the ability to build coalitions. According to Duree (2007), other studies have identified additional skills necessary for successful leadership, including: stress tolerance, problem analysis, personal motivation, organizational ability, written communication, educational values, and oral communication skills and judgment.

Wallin (2010) stated that “transformational leadership is a process that changes and transforms followers” (p. 7). She explained that many of the attributes of transformational leadership are embodied in change leadership. Change leadership, according to Wallin, is both broader and deeper. It can be viewed as a four-part process that includes anticipating change, analyzing both internal and external environments, acting on data and the strengths of team members, and affirming the institution’s actions with the end result of continuous improvement.

Cloud (2010) defined change leadership as “a moral act, based on ethical actions, that serves the long-term interests of the college and its constituencies” (p. 74). He said that change leadership is more complex than transformational leadership, as it facilitates change in both individuals and the organization in which they work. In a community college, both faculty and staff would be encouraged to “brainstorm current and anticipated issues and recommend changes” (Cloud, 2010, p. 74).

Community college leadership needs to move from a two-dimensional viewpoint of leadership to one that encompasses multiple dimensions, according to Eddy (2010). Eddy (2010) proposed a model for multidimensional leadership that provides “flexibility and a construction based on an individual’s core experiences, beliefs, and capabilities. Furthermore, a multidimensional model recognizes that many of the leadership dimensions a leader possesses are part of a continuum and will change or evolve over time” (pp. 31–32).

Eddy’s (2010) model includes five basic propositions:

1. There is no universal model for leadership.
2. Multidimensional leadership is necessary in complex organizations.
3. Leaders rely on their underlying cognitive scheme in making leadership decisions.
4. Leaders often adhere to their core belief structure.
5. Leaders are learners.

Proposition 1—There is no universal model for leadership: With this proposition Eddy (2010) did not intend to undermine the previously stated AACC leadership competencies. Rather, she believed there is not one right way to lead, and a wide variety of individuals can become effective leaders. She intended to move beyond the leadership approaches based on the studies of White men and focus on a broader approach to understand the complexities facing current and future leaders in the community college system.

Proposition 2—Multidimensional leadership is necessary in complex organizations: Eddy (2010) noted that community colleges have undergone much change on a variety of fronts including finance, governance, outreach, and student learning and that presidents have needed more skills and broader knowledge base in order to remain effective. In addition, leaders require skills in relationship building, communication, team building, negotiations,

and change facilitation. When leaders focus on many different aspects of leadership, they find their personal leadership development continues to grow.

Proposition 3—Leaders rely on their underlying cognitive schema in making leadership decisions: Cognitive schema is a type of mental map that leaders use to guide their thinking. Eddy (2010) indicated that a leader's schema is critical to multidimensional leadership. A leader will rely heavily on his or her underlying schema, but over time and through reflection and learning, will be able to shift and change in order to respond to ever changing and challenging situations.

Proposition 4—Leaders often adhere to their core belief structure: The underlying schema of leaders is based on past experiences, according to Eddy (2010). Leaders are able to modify and supplement their belief structure through continual learning. This becomes more important as leaders need to act and react in increasingly more complex situations to align with their theory. The way in which leaders speak about plans for the future of the institution offer a glimpse at their schema and leadership approaches.

Proposition 5—Leaders are learners: Lifelong learning is important to college leaders. For potential leaders, learning can be accomplished with case studies and internships. For current presidents, learning is ongoing on a daily basis with internal situations and external activities. Research has shown that when leaders question their own actions and reflect on their own leadership style and behavior, they make improvements that benefit the entire institution (Eddy, 2010).

Women's Leadership Styles

According to Amey (1999), community colleges are places where “virtually anyone can succeed, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, or cultural capital”

(p. 60). Although one might view this as being true for students, this statement might not always hold true for women moving into administrative positions, as Amey also described the leadership and organizational behaviors in these same community colleges to be bureaucratic, hierarchical, and led by mostly males. When Townsend (1995) considered the relationship between gender and power in relation to the role of president, she said,

As presidents, women are in positions of power to effect change. They have the opportunity to help create and develop an institutional environment that embraces women, minorities, and all nontraditional students and staff. It is not only women presidents who have this opportunity. All institutional presidents can strive to do so. What is not clear is if the gender of a president may be a factor in that person's willingness or desire to use institutional power to develop an inclusive environment.

(p. 1)

Chliwniak (1997) viewed that the male leadership models and organizational structures in higher education create a difficult environment women:

Colleges and universities are dominated by male leadership, however, concerns regarding administrative procedures the exclude women and create chilly campus climates continue to plague academic institutions. Many believe that by closing the leadership gap, institutions would become more centered on process and persons (described as feminized concerns) rather than focused on tasks and outcomes (attributed to masculine styles of leadership. (p. 2)

Chliwniak also noted that, whereas “men are more concerned with systems and rules, women are more concerned with relations and atmosphere” (p. 2).

Women have proven they are capable leaders of institutions of higher education, including Ivy League institutions, according to Bornstein (2007):

Harvard's historic appointment of a woman president . . . reflects a sea of change in the nature of higher education and leadership . . . a new paradigm for leadership in the 21st century higher education institutions. In the new competitive, fast-moving, global economy, institutions must be innovative, entrepreneurial, nimble, and flexible. These characteristics depend on collaborative and consultative leadership, qualities that women bring to the table . . . and that the special leadership qualities of women are recognized and valued. (p. 21)

Studies have shown that women presidents have modified their behaviors in order to fit into gender-related expectations. Bornstein (2007) noted,

When women first came into the presidency, they sometimes adopted the traditional male model of leadership based on a hierarchical, top-down, command and control paradigm. They and their constituents had gender-specific expectations for the presidency derived from the male-dominated institutions. (p. 21–22).

Eddy (2003) found “the double bind for the woman president to ‘do gender’ means they ultimately reinforce the very structures of the male norm that is limiting in the first place” (p. 19).

In a study of gender differences in transformational leadership, Roueche et al. (1989) found that women were more likely than were men to possess certain attributes of transformational leadership. Ewing Ross (2006) confirmed this by stating that her participant Theodora J. Kalikow embodied these attributes:

She takes risks, is collaborative, cares for and respects others, and has garnered a great deal of trust from her colleagues. These qualities contribute to her strengths as a president. Perhaps women are more likely than men to have these traits because of the way in which women are socialized, a phenomenon Theo described when reflecting on gender differences in leadership. (pp. 144–145).

The differing leadership styles of women and men were studied by Rosener (1990). Rosener's study included men and women executives with similar backgrounds, and concluded that the way each gender viewed leadership was different. She said men tended to lead through a series of what she called "transactions," rewarding employees for a job well done and punishing them for a job poorly done. The study indicated that women leaders were more interested in transforming other's self-interest into organizational goals, with the women being quick to encourage, share power and information, enhance other's self-worth, and get others excited about work.

Three stages of women's leadership styles were described by Wenniger and Conroy (2001). The first stage began in the 1970s, and women were encouraged to get rid of feminine behaviors and follow the paths of traditional male hierarchical leadership. Women were tasked with changing their style to "fit in." The second stage began in the mid-1980s with women voicing dissatisfaction with this top-down style of management. Women found this management style often did not fit with their socialized natures. In this stage, women began asking how they could fit in as a woman. The third stage began in the mid-1990s with both women and men matching their skills and abilities to that of their organizations.

A framework for action by female community college presidents was developed by DiCroce (1995). She included five actions that should serve "as a blueprint for those who are

women community college presidents to effect meaningful change at their institutions and impact larger public policy issues of academe and society at large” (p. 85). Her recommended actions were:

1. Initially break down institutional gender stereotypes. Women must embrace the moment when they break the gender barrier at their institutions.
2. Penetrate institution’s power structure and redefine its sense of power. Women can use the power of their office to affect the institution’s power structure and create institutional climates conducive to redefining of this power.

Women presidents are also well positioned to model a power structure built less on hierarchy and more on relationship, with a free exchange of information and an openness for collegial debate and discussion. They can be mentors for women faculty and staff and role models for women students. (p. 85)

3. Use power of office to alter gender-related institutional policy. As community colleges are a microcosm of society, women presidents have the opportunity to ensure their institutions adopt and enforce strong policies.
4. Raise collegial consciousness and initiate collegial dialogue on gender and related issues. Women presidents can use their power to give a voice to issues of civility, diversity, and equal opportunity on the community college campus.
5. Become an active player for public policy development and debate beyond the college level. Women community college presidents can contribute to “society’s larger agendas by becoming active players for public policy development and debate in the regional, state, and national arenas” (p. 86).

Emotional Intelligence

According to Goleman (1998), truly effective leaders possess a high degree of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence includes the attributes of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social interaction. Goleman stated that what distinguishes “outstanding” leaders from “average” leaders is a higher degree of emotional intelligence. Studies have continued in the field of social neuroscience, or the study of what happens in the brain while individuals interact (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008). “Leading effectively is, in other words, less about mastering situations—or even mastering social skill sets—than about developing a genuine interest in and talent for fostering positive feelings in the people whose cooperation and support you need” (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008, p. 76).

The connection between human performance and emotional intelligence was addressed by Covey (1990), who established seven habits for the development of emotional skills.

1. Habit of personal vision. This involves exploring and developing emotional skills for each individual.
2. Habit of personal leadership. This involves using and understanding emotional competency.
3. Habit of personal management. This involves self-management including ethics, drive, strength, positive personal change and time management.
4. Habit of interpersonal leadership. This involves decision making, empathy and leadership skills.
5. Habit of empathic communication. This involves anger control, comfort, empathy, fear control, and stress management.

6. Habit of creative cooperation. This involves developing emotional intelligence in all competency areas.
7. Habit of renewal. This involves further exploration of emotional intelligence skills.

A study conducted by Jorfi, Yacco, and Shah (2012) confirmed the differences between the male and female segments of the study in regard to emotional intelligence. The authors concluded that “women are more responsible by nature and are generally more concerned about the people as compared to men.” (p. 595).

Emotional intelligence and transformational leadership both focus on the relationship between emotions and leadership. Lopez-Zafra, Garcia-Retamero, and Martos (2012) tied emotional intelligence and transformational leadership to gender in a study of 431 undergraduate students. Their results indicated that emotional intelligence and gender can predict success as a leader. Due to this finding, the authors concluded that leaders should be trained in emotional intelligence, as such training could help them become more successful leaders. Emotional intelligence training “may reduce the prejudice against female leaders or at least erode it by stressing the importance of the relation between emotional intelligence (which is often high in women) and leadership style” (Lopez-Zafra et al., 2012, p. 107).

The discovery of mirror neurons in the brain has added to the study of emotional intelligence (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008). Goleman and Boyatzis (2008) stated that these neurons in the brain mimic, or mirror, what other individuals do: “When we consciously or unconsciously detect someone else’s emotions through their actions, our mirror neurons reproduce those emotions. Collectively, these neurons create an instant sense of shared

experience” (p. 76). In order to become “socially smarter,” Goleman and Boyatzis recommended coaching sessions with experienced mentors:

The more times [the person being coached] spent reviewing incidents, the better she became at recognizing the difference between expressing an idea with conviction and acting like a pit bull. She began to anticipate how people might react to her in a meeting or during a negative performance review; she rehearsed more-astute ways to present her opinions; and she developed a personal vision for change. Such mental preparation activates the social circuitry of the brain, strengthening the neural connections you need to act effectively; that’s why Olympic athletes put hundreds of hours into mental review of their moves. (p. 79)

Pathways to the Presidency

The most common pathway to the position of a community college president continues to be through the academic ranks. Weisman and Vaughan (2006) reported that AACC indicated the traditional pathway through the academic pipeline is the most prevalent for current presidents. When presidents were asked the position held immediately prior to their first president, 54.5 percent responded that position was within academic administration.

According to Duree’s (2007) study, an earned doctorate is the highest degree for the majority of leadership positions. He reported that 87 percent of the respondents had either a Ph.D. or an Ed.D. (p. 111). An advanced degree is of great importance, but also of importance is experience in academic ranks. Duree suggested that individuals with understanding and relationships with faculty remain a primary concern when institutions search for a new leader. Most of the presidents in Duree’s study had held other senior level

administrative positions prior to their first presidency. A total of 82 percent had held positions as academic administrators, campus provosts/presidents or central office administrators. In addition, over 65 percent had spent time as either full-time or part-time instructors (p. 68).

Duree (2007) also noted that 38 percent of the community college presidents in his study reported a community college leadership emphasis for the major field of study. This contrasts to a study by Amey and VanDerLinden (2002) who reported that less than two percent indicated such a major. Duree suggested that the new generation of community college presidents may be an indicator of success for new university leadership development programs.

Stubbe (2008) found a significant gender difference in the major field of study. She found that 90.9 percent of females earned their highest degree in the field of education, as compared to 76.1 percent of males. Stubbe believed this may be the result of females responding to leadership programs specifically related to community colleges.

According to ACE (2007), serving as chief academic officer has become a more typical route to the presidency. A total of 31 percent of presidents served as provost or chief academic officer prior to becoming president, up from 23 percent in 1986.

Females tended to begin their presidencies at a later age than did males, according to Stubbe (2008). Although the majority of presidents began their first presidencies between the ages of 50 and 59 years, 14.3 percent of males became presidents between 30 and 39 years of age compared to 6.2 percent of females.

Opportunities for Training

Surrounding the issues of leadership and preparing new leaders to fill upcoming vacancies is the opportunity for training. Taking advantage of all possible training opportunities is key to developing leadership skills.

Although total agreement has been shown on the necessity of achieving these basic competencies, how to go about the achievement is somewhat more of a challenge. One of the statements developed in the AACC (2001) document is “leadership can be learned. Although it can be enhanced immeasurably by natural aptitude and experience, supporting leaders with exposure to theory, concepts, cases, guided experiences, and other practical information and learning methodologies is essential” (p. 3). According to Duree (2007), other studies have identified additional skills necessary for successful leadership to include stress tolerance, problem analysis, personal motivation, organization ability, written communication, educational values, and oral communication skills and judgment.

Fulton-Calkins and Milling (2005) stated that effective leadership development processes should begin with the following two questions: (a) What skills are needed by community college leaders? and (b) How are these skills developed? The development process they recommended includes the following nine essential skills:

- Learning from the past while embracing the future,
- Enriching the inward journey,
- Leading from the center,
- Making connections,
- Looking broadly for talent,
- Providing continual leadership opportunities through succession planning,

- Keeping faculty in the mix,
- Forging business and industry connections, and
- Not forgetting students—they are the future workforce.

Some institutions have developed programs to grow their own leaders, and others look outside for training opportunities. According to Barden (2006), an institution that is looking forward and preparing for leadership succession is anticipating leadership change and dealing with it internally. Many institutions are developing methods and strategies of preparing candidates to fill upcoming openings. Conferences, training programs such as LINC and CLIC (Community College Leadership Initiative Consortium), and mentoring are all being utilized.

Duree (2007) noted that 57 percent of the presidents in his study participated in leadership development programs outside of formal education. Participants indicated these programs included programs sponsored by AACC, ACE, the Association of Community College Trustees, Harvard University, Iowa State University, the League for Innovation, W. K. Kellogg Foundation, and numerous other state and private organizations (Duree, 2007, p. 113). Further data demonstrated that two out of five respondents in his study participated in similar programs after entering the position of president.

This finding would suggest that whether presidents afford themselves the opportunity to participate in leadership programs before or after they begin the job, these programs address an obvious need for training beyond the scope of what is made available through formalized education programs and background experiences.

(Duree, 2007, p. 113)

Women often avoid or postpone training for and assuming leadership roles due to demands of family responsibilities (Eddy, 2008; M. Green, 1997). One way to encourage women's participation in leadership training is to capitalize on many of the "grow your own" programs such as LINC. According to Ebbers et al. (2000), LINC was created through the coordinated efforts of Iowa State University, the Iowa Community College Trustees Association, and the Iowa Community College Presidents. The goal of this program was to "provide participants with academic and internship opportunities designed to encourage the advancement of women and people of color into administrative leadership roles within the Iowa community college system" (Ebbers et al., 2000, p. 376).

In his study, Duree (2007) had participants respond to the six competencies identified by AACC (2005). Survey results indicated that community college presidents were most prepared for developing a positive work environment embracing innovation, teamwork, and successful outcomes. In regards to resource management, results indicated that community college presidents were well-prepared with the exception of seeking ethical alternative funding sources. The competency of communication also was viewed by presidents as a skill they were well prepared for, as they felt comfortable articulating mission, vision, and values statements. Collaboration was an area in which community college presidents did not rate themselves very successful. Duree's results also showed that one third of the presidents responding to his survey did not feel well prepared to lead with cultural competence in a global society. Community college advocacy was a competency for which respondents felt they were prepared or well prepared. Within this same competency, however, respondents did not feel prepared to promote diversity, inclusion, equity, and academic excellence. Additionally, they indicated they were not prepared to demonstrate commitment to the

mission of the community college and student success through teaching and learning. Duree offered a recommendation of implementing leadership and mentorship programs to develop this skill in presidential candidates. Finally, for the competency of professionalism, respondents viewed themselves more prepared overall than not prepared. Approximately one out of three presidents did not view themselves to be transformational leaders prior to assuming their first position as president. Duree concluded that learning experiences from a variety of sources over time assisted the presidents in developing the necessary leadership skills.

In her study, Stubbe (2008) reported that more female than male community college presidents had participated in training opportunities before and during their first position as president. A total of 74 percent of females participated in a leadership program of some sort prior to their work as president. This compares to less than half of the male respondents. Stubbe concluded that this leadership preparation may have helped female community college presidents to “gain self-confidence” (p. 105), because 85.6 percent of females considered themselves transformational leaders compared to 82.4 percent of males. However, 30.3 percent of females were unsure of others’ perceptions of their abilities and continued leadership development activities after becoming president, as compared to 22.5 percent of males.

Although much time has been spent on which traits and characteristics are necessary to become a successful leader, in addition to training opportunities, one must keep in mind the various life experiences and how they have had an impact. Welch (2005) defined leadership in a unique manner, saying, “Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others” (p. 61). This truly

gets at the heart of what being a leader really is. There are many ways to accomplish this feat, but first one must define in one's own mind what leadership really is.

In considering the wide variety of training opportunities available, Eddy (2005) commented, "Perhaps the most significant finding from this study is that there is no one way for leaders to learn about leadership, just as there is no one way of leading" (p. 724).

Role of Mentoring

A common piece of advice for potential community college presidents is to "get a mentor" (McDade, 2005). McDade said that, with commitment to the mentoring relationship, protégés are able observe varied leadership styles, employ multiple leadership lenses to analyze situations, and consider several diagnosis options. This relationship matures over time to foster a learning environment for both the protégé and mentor alike.

A study of six regional public and private institutions was conducted by Hubbard and Robinson (1998). This study viewed females in leadership positions. The researchers found that mentoring is one strategy females are using to help advance their leadership skills: "Females reported having female mentors more often than male mentors in their early professional careers" (p. 296.). These females said that the mentors provided advice and guidance in addition to helping with politics and procedures. Hubbard and Robinson also said, "Female mentors can help expedite plans for career advancement" (p. 291).

According to V. Green (2008), having mentors to aid in the pathway to leadership is important for females. V. Green said, "Mentors for future leaders can help prepare these individuals for the realities of what is to come" (p. 815). She said three male mentors were very helpful to her as she improved leadership skills. Her mentors were leaders she aspired to mirror. She stated,

I observed their ways of handling people and situations. It was helpful to me to observe how they communicated verbally and in writing and how they problem solved. I learned from them how to lead and how not to lead . . . how to inspire and influence and how not to inspire and influence. (p. 815)

Through mentoring, an individual can learn what to do and what not to do. This is an aspect of mentoring that many overlook, according to V. Green (2008). Although V. Green did not include her spouse as one of her mentors, he was an important part of her taking on more leadership responsibilities. She said, “When the opportunity [for leadership] came around again a few years later, my daughters were older and more independent, and my husband was supportive—so I decided to try it out. I liked it” (p. 817). The importance of balancing family and work life in relation to leadership skills is also an issue for females.

A participant in a study conducted by Jones Edwards (2001) shared that she felt “called” to share her gifts with others. She spoke with great confidence, saying, “I am very committed to helping other women meet their personal goals, to see their untapped gifts and rights, and to encourage and enable them in any way I can” (p. 133). One of her lessons she shared with other women is how she made life choices that supported her commitment to live for something greater than herself and to maintain the necessary balance in life. After the birth of her second son she said, “When it was time to go back [to work] I couldn’t leave my two little boys. I stayed home for about ten years. . . . That was a really rich time for me and I’ll never regret being home with my children” (p. 133).

In Eddy’s (2005) study of nine community college presidents, she found that individuals also made choices on what behaviors not to model. “Thus, as these individuals began to construct their ideals of leadership, they were making choices to either model the

behaviors or those mentoring them or consciously choosing to *not* model the leaders in which they were in contact” (Eddy, 2005, p. 712).

Mentoring also aids protégés in networking. Eddy (2005) found that mentors not only played a strong role in forming perspectives on events on campus and decision-making processes, they also opened doors and provided opportunities for growth. Because many leadership programs require sponsorship, mentors can often fill this role for a protégé as well.

Mentoring programs should be established to assist in effective transitioning of an employee from one position to another, as recommended by Fulton-Calkins and Milling (2005). Mentors should come from within the organization in order to offer effective guidance and provide dependable support within the institution itself. Once a mentoring program is implemented, it should be evaluated regularly.

According to survey results from Duree’s (2007) study, approximately one out of two community college leaders participated in a mentor–protégé relationship as a protégé prior to assuming presidential duties. In addition, more than 85 percent were currently participating in formal or informal mentor–protégé relationships as a mentor.

Stubbe (2008) stated that over 66 percent of female presidents in her study reported having mentors, with 42 percent of the males responding to working with mentors. Generally the protégé was approached by the mentor for both males and females, but study results indicate that females were more confident at approaching a mentor to begin the relationship. Additionally, females were much more likely to participate in multiple mentor–protégé relationships than were their male counterparts. Stubbe found that 43.2 percent of females had a female mentor, whereas only 17.5 percent of males had a female mentor. This would be a logical disparity with the smaller percentage of female presidents. Her study also

revealed that 93.9 percent of female presidents took time during their years as president to mentor others as compared to 83 percent of males choosing to be a mentor.

A study of 300 community college administrator in the state of Michigan was conducted by VanDerLinden (2005). She found that over 56 percent of the sample indicated they had a mentor during their career in higher education administration. VanDerLinden defined a mentor as “a long-term, professionally centered relationship between two individuals in which the more experienced individual, the mentor, guides, advises, and assists in the career of the less experiences protégé” (p. 737). Over 52 percent of those who responded that they had a mentor indicated that their mentor had assisted them in obtaining their current position.

Additionally, VanDerLinden (2005) asked an open-ended question about the most important things a mentor had done to help in career advancement. The following themes were revealed:

- Mentors provided encouragement and advice.
- Mentors provided specific help with aspects of one’s career—such as serving as a reference.
- Mentors provided exposure to certain activities, including opportunities to take on additional responsibilities and other professional growth opportunities.
- Mentors specifically encouraged the mentee to participate in professional development or additional education.
- Mentors helped the mentee to develop professional networks.
- Mentors provided training on a specific skill or provided information/answers to a particular problem or issue.

- Mentors helped with the political aspects of the job.
- Mentors helped mentee to see the “bigger picture. (p. 737)

These themes indicate that mentors are able to assist potential leaders in a multitude of areas including learning, providing encouragement and advice, networking, and alleviating barriers.

Challenges for Community College Presidents

Increasing demands on a community college president lead to ever more challenges. The complexity and diversity of the position of president continue to grow. Presidents in the upcoming years should expect to be called upon to juggle a wider variety of duties, solve more dilemmas, and balance personal and professional schedules more diligently.

Duree (2007) found the following challenges for community college presidents in the new millennium:

- Fundraising,
- Student enrollment and retention,
- Legislative advocacy,
- Economic and workforce development, and
- Faculty relations

These categories have remained consistent with those that Vaughan and Weisman (1998) reported. Their findings showed funding, technology, leadership and governance, interacting with change, accountability and mission, and workforce development as the important demands made on a community college president. Duree (2007) also noted that, in addition, community college presidents must be able to follow through with developing mandates focused on recruitment and retention of students (p. 116).

Service on external boards is a component of the presidency that Stubbe (2008) noted in her study. She reported that males are twice as likely to serve on external boards than are females. She compared her results with the study conducted by Weisman and Vaughan (2006) and noted that external board service has decreased, possibly due to rising enrollment figures in the community college system and increasing demands on the president (p. 109).

Females have a history of leading institutions of higher education in the United States, although in small numbers. Julia Sears served as the first woman president of Mankato Normal School in Minnesota in 1871 (Tisinger, 1991). According to ACE (2007), 63 percent of women presidents were currently married, compared with 89 percent of their male colleagues. A total of 24 percent of women presidents were either divorced or were never married (excluding members of religious orders), whereas only seven percent of male presidents were counted in these categories.

Stubbe (2008) indicated that female community college presidents in her study were over five times more likely to be divorced/separated or single than were their male counterparts. In her study, 5.3 percent of males were divorced/separated or single as compared with 27.3 percent of female presidents. Stubbe said that cause and effect could not be determined in her study, although she indicated that an area for further research is whether or not female community college presidents are making sacrifices in marital status and family life for administrative advancement in the educational system.

One of the participants in Eddy's (2005) study indicated that her role as a mother made her advancement to the role of president difficult. She said:

It was clear to me when my son was just three or four years old that I could not take an administrative position and protect what was important to me, which was the

stability of my marriage and my son's growing up in a stable environment, so I left the associate dean's position. (p. 714)

In addition to the need for training, Ebbers et al. (2000) noted that an obstacle females need to overcome in their leadership advancement is the mindset of community college boards of trustees. They saw that boards appeared to favor job candidates by how they "fit in a male-dominated environment" (p. 380).

According to Sullivan (2001), the climate for community college presidents includes the following challenges:

- a scarcity of resources,
- changing student and staff demographics,
- shift from teaching to student learning and learning outcomes assessment,
- technological developments that claim a large proportion of the operating budget, challenge instructional methods and require retraining of staff and faculty members,
- increasing regulation by external agencies,
- public skepticism about the institution's ability to meet learning needs of consumers,
- competition from private institutions,
- blurring of service boundaries resulting from online and distance learning,
- reduced emphasis on degree completion, and
- a nearly unbearable barrage of information. (p. 560)

According to a question on a 2001 AACC survey question, presidents identified that they had not prepared themselves fully for the overwhelming nature of the job they had chosen to undertake (Shults, 2001).

Summary

Community college presidents have been called upon to lead their institutions through turbulent times, and community college presidents will be required to continue leading through challenges of ever-changing natures. According to Eddy (2005),

In general, new presidents enter an existing college setting steeped in history and with an established culture. While leaders have experiences upon which to draw as they take over the helm of the college, they need to learn how to lead within the particular context of their new college. (p. 715)

In some ways, females see themselves suited for the position of president because of their past experiences. One of the participants in Eddy's (2005) study stated:

I spoke in my first convocation piece that I was particularly well suited to this challenge because we had raised a family on a single faculty member's salary, since I didn't work when our children were young, but I was always pinching pennies and managing, so I was very well equipped for this job. (p. 714)

Although more females have filled the position of community college president over the past 20 years, the increase has not been as dramatic in the past several years. The idea of "moving out to move up" may not be the first option for those seeking leadership positions. Only 28 percent of presidents were promoted; however, 49 percent of all senior administrators were internal hires (ACE, 2007). Also, internal promotion was the most common route to advancement for chief academic officers and deans. These two positions are most often the pathway to a presidency.

Thus, the roadmap to the presidency is not static, but rather dynamic and changing. Eddy (2005) said,

Some of the presidents interviewed in the study considered themselves visionary and charismatic leaders. Others saw themselves as team players or servant leaders. Still others saw themselves as the ultimate decision-maker and leader for the campus.

Each president had a different road map that they used while leading their campuses.

(p. 720)

College presidents must constantly learn and adjust their perspectives on leadership in order to survive and effectively lead their institutions.

According to Eddy (2005), women in her study still highlighted the binds they faced in climbing the hierarchy and finding an authentic way to lead. This point is important for leaders who do not match the historical definition of a community college president as a White male.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS

The purpose of this study was to analyze the first-year experiences of female community college presidents. By considering the stories of these participants, greater insight is gained for future females aspiring to similar positions. Additionally, it is hoped that the information gathered through this study offers insight into pathways females undertake to obtain a presidency position; what training, mentoring, and educational opportunities are important to success in the pivotal first year of community college presidency; situations occurring in the first year of a presidency; and gaps in preparation for a presidency position.

Qualitative research methods were used for this study. This chapter provides the reasons for using qualitative methods and describes the epistemology, theoretical framework, methodology and methods used for the study.

The research questions that guided this study include:

1. How do female community college presidents describe their pathways to a presidency position?
2. How do female community college presidents view prior training, mentoring, and educational opportunities that led to successful experiences during the first year as a community college president?
3. How do female community college presidents view their experiences during their first year in that position?
4. How do female community college presidents explain any voids or deficiencies in their career pathway that made achieving success during their first year more challenging?

Reasons for Using Qualitative Methods

The reasons for employing a qualitative analysis in this study stems from the nature of what is being studied: the experiences of first-year female community college presidents. Qualitative researchers study participants in their natural environments while attempting to make sense of lived experiences in terms of the meanings participants bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 3). Qualitative methods were employed for several reasons. My research gathered stories of lived experiences from each participant. This study was best suited to examine these experiences from the female presidents' point of view (Merriam, 1991). Each female community college president shared stories of her pathway to the presidency and experiences of her first year in that position.

Through the use of qualitative methods, this study was able to focus on the “how” and “why” of each woman’s leadership stories (Merriam, 1991). Examining how each woman made meaning of her own personal experiences leading up to and within the first year of the presidency offers insight into her success and implications applicable for other women’s potential success.

Qualitative methods also offer researchers the opportunity to look for depth of understanding as opposed to breadth of knowledge for generalization (Merriam, 1991). Each participant’s story is unique and pertinent to her life story. However, others can benefit from implications and meanings shared.

Constructivist Epistemology

This study was structured with a constructivist epistemology. Crotty (1998) defined constructionism as “the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between

human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42). Denzin and Lincoln (1998) viewed qualitative researchers as “philosophers” in reference to the fact that researchers use their personal perspective for how he or she views the world related to understanding what is knowing and being. “All research is interpretive, guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 26).

As I studied females in leadership positions at the president level, this epistemology worked well, as the participants were continually seeking to construct reality out of life experiences. My goal was to understand how the community college presidents made meaning through their lived experiences. In a constructivist epistemology, meaning is not a hidden resource but, rather, a way in which research constructs ideas, forms perspectives, and develops concepts (Crotty, 1998).

Theoretical Framework

A basic interpretive theoretical framework was used for this study. According to Crotty (1998), people seek meaning and understanding of their social world within the theoretical framework of basic interpretivism. In addition, Merriam (2002) said, “This meaning is mediated through the researcher as instrument, the strategy is inductive, and the outcome is descriptive” (p. 6). According to Esterberg (2002), interpretive approaches are like symbolic interactionism, and she described three premises:

The first is that humans act toward things based on the meanings those things have for them. . . . The second premise is that the meanings of things arise out of social interaction. . . . The third premise is that meanings are created (and changed) through a process of interpretation. (p. 15)

Therefore, interpretivism was a perspective well suited to the study I undertook, as the participants were seeking meaning of their social world.

Narrative Analysis Methodology

Narrative analysis is a form of qualitative research that allows a researcher to share insights from participants included in a study. Why should researchers be interested in the methodology of narrative analysis? Most people are storytellers by nature. Cognitive scientists have found that stories are memorable and better support learning and understanding (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Researchers utilizing a qualitative research design are searching for learning and understanding through insights of participants. Narrative analysis is an effective methodology to accomplish this task.

Through the use of narrative analysis, a researcher is able to gather rich and unique data for a study. Multiple perspectives can be included, and data not obtainable from experiments, questionnaires, or observations can be gathered. Narrative is especially beneficial when a researcher is looking at shared cultures, beliefs, and histories of a group of people. The stories and narratives can shed understanding on the problem being investigated.

According to Merriam (2002), the basis of narrative analysis is to believe that a story has broad cultural context and meaning. Historically stories have been used to convey meaning in such a way as to explain existence or any of the many human emotions. Stories have allowed the human race to explain existence and identity.

Defining the Term *Narrative Analysis*

Narrative analysis can be interpreted in many different ways. The definition of *narrative* found in *Webster's Third International Dictionary* (1966), "a discourse, or an example of it, designated to represent a connected succession of happenings" (p. 1503),

provides a general interpretation. Looking at narrative analysis from a research perspective, Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) defined the term as “any study that analyzes narrative materials” (p. 2). They included that the data can be collected in a variety of manners such as a life story from a literary work, an interview, or also from field notes or observations.

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry is defined as stories lived and told. They went on to include in their definition that “narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus” (p. 20). In this definition, the component of a story is merged with understanding, relationships, time, and location.

Narrative analysis places an emphasis on sequence and consequence. Individuals select, organize, connect, and evaluate their experiences within a particular context. Narrative analysis also looks at how and why a participant’s story was told, the manner in which it was told, and the story’s total content and context (Schram, 2006). In addition, narrative analysis relies on interpretation of data by assuming that the stories, reflections, and language used by participants and how a particular narrative is relayed has deep significance and meaning in revealing deep truths regarding social reality (Esterberg, 2002).

Bruner (1996) pointed out that narrative has an important role in the construction and assimilation of knowledge. He saw human beings as natural narrators. Bruner further claimed that narrative is one tool learners can use to interpret, adapt to, and live in the world in which they find themselves. When Frankland (2010) conducted her research, she acknowledged that

the purpose of my study was not to compare groups or generalize the results to a larger population. As I chose narrative inquiry as my methodology, I remained open to what my data would reveal to me rather than having preconceived expectations. (p. 255)

According to Bloom (2002), narrative research focuses on the “self” of the participant for data collection and research. She believed that narrative analysis employs three goals within its theoretical structure. First, narrative analysis uses an individual’s life as a primary source of data. Bloom (2002) had researched specifically women’s narratives and believed that the research focuses on more than the content. Also included is the “interplay between the narrative that is told and the structure of the telling that is critical” (p. 311). As the “truth” of the narrative is subjective, the context and construction of the text must be viewed simultaneously. Bloom (2002) explained that

the task of the researcher, then, is to make sense of the telling rather than the tale. This is done by recording and interpreting how an individual has lived and made meaning about her life and by creating an interpretive text that explicates how and why individuals construct stories about themselves to serve particular purposes. (p. 311)

The second goal defined by Bloom (2002) is that narrative analysis should generate social critique and advocacy. The researcher starts with an individual participant at the center of the research, which then broadens into a perspective as this individual as part of a social world, interacting with many other individuals. The narratives gathered can be used as a lens to view a larger portion of society.

Bloom's (2002) third goal of narrative analysis is that of deconstructing the "self" as a humanist conception and advancing nonunitary conceptions of the self. According to Bloom (2002), nonunitary subjectivity is "an empowering interpretive theory, both because it encourages researchers to generate alternative and more complex understandings of those who are studied, and because it helps respondents understand and interpret their lives in more forgiving and thoughtful ways" (p. 312).

Foundations of Narrative Analysis

A qualitative research design lends itself to a researcher desiring to gain understanding about human experiences. According to Creswell (1998), a qualitative research paradigm implements an "interpretive, naturalistic approach" (p. 15).

Narrative analysis originates in a constructionism epistemology. Crotty (1998) defined constructionism as "the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (p. 42). This flows into a basic interpretive theoretical framework. As Crotty explained this framework, people seek meaning and understanding of their social world within the theoretical framework of basic interpretivism.

According to Schram (2006), a qualitative paradigm holds the assumption that all knowledge is interpretative, and that researchers who follow it will seek the meaning they have gained from their data. Narrative analysis falls within this paradigm. From this foundation, narrative analysis becomes a solid methodology.

The foundation of narrative analysis is grounded in theory of hermeneutics. More formally defined, hermeneutics is the science of Biblical interpretation. According to Crotty (1998),

the actual explanation of what a Biblical text means is known as exegesis. Behind all exegetical activity, governing how it is carried out, lies a complexus of theories, principles, rules and methods. That complexus came to be known as hermeneutics. (p. 87)

Hermeneutics assumes a relationship between text and reader, which is the basis for the interpretation that must occur. “Texts are not just antique or foreign curiosities. They are means of transmitting meaning—experience, beliefs, values—from one person or community to another. Hermeneutics assumes a link between the two that makes the exercise feasible” (Crotty, 1998, p. 91).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) credited John Dewey as an important force in the development of narrative analysis. The term “experience” is key in Dewey’s educational writings. To Dewey, experience is both personal and social: “People are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only at individuals. They are always in relation, always in a social context” (p. 2). Dewey also added that experience includes the concept of continuity. He saw that experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to additional experiences. This continuum is integral to narrative analysis.

Narrative Structure

According to Esterberg (2002), stories have a certain structure to them. Although most researchers see that stories have a beginning, middle, and end, sociolinguist William

Labov (1978) stated that all stories additionally have common elements. He listed six basic elements including: abstract, orientation complication, evaluation, results, and coda. All stories will not include every element, but all must have some type of action. Esterberg went on to explain Labov's elements further. The abstract is the introduction to a story. Orientation provides the basic information about the story itself. Complication tells the reader what happens next. Evaluation entices the reader to continue on with the story, whereas the results relay what happened at the end of the story. The coda gives the reader the conclusion to the story itself. In addition to identifying the structure of the story, Labov's elements assist in coding the narrative. Patterson (2008) explained that these basic elements can be used to identify specific elements in the narrative; secondly, the elements can highlight structure to the narrative; and thirdly, the elements can shed light on linguistic features of the narrative.

Merriam (2002) identified three different approaches to narrative analysis: biographical, psychological, and linguistic. Within the biographical approach, gender, family of origin, life events, and other persons in the participant's life are of great importance. A psychological approach focuses more on personal thoughts and motivations. And the linguistic approach closely examines the language of the story, whether that be written or spoken. If spoken, it takes into consideration the intonation, pitch, and pauses of the speaker's voice.

Researcher Positionality

As with all qualitative studies, the issue of objectivity needs to be addressed. In social research, in which human behavior and interaction is studied, total objectivity is impossible to achieve (Esterberg, 2002).

According to Jones, Torres, & Arminio (2006), understanding one's worldview and researcher reflexivity are essential elements of good qualitative inquiry. They said, "Because we are using a narrative approach to analysis, it is important for us to acknowledge the importance of context and how context impacts our individual stories and the interpretations we make of these stories" (p. 176).

Indeed, every decision in research influences the process and outcome of a particular study. The positionality of a researcher is evident in all stages of the research and must never be overlooked. Researcher reflexivity is an important skill to be developed and one that is integral to conducting good qualitative work. Jones et al. (2006) stated, "The very nature of qualitative inquiry squares the researcher off with his or her assumptions each and every time a study is conducted" (p. 187). A statement of my positionality is included in chapter 1.

Strengths of Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis is capable of accomplishing much within qualitative research. Johnson (2009) said that her approach to storytelling and narrative research not only recollects the past, but also aids in constituting the future. She stated, "As I will argue, the act of storytelling allows the principal to generate extensive educational knowledge in collaboration with a listener/interviewer about what it means to be a principal who strives to facilitate change under somewhat difficult circumstances" (p. 273).

Glover Frykman (2009) acknowledged that narratives are part and parcel of our daily lives. Narratives are used every day to recount what has happened or is happening. She said, "Narratives also challenge existing ways of thinking and thereby facilitate change and development" (p. 318). In her study of Swedish museums, she found that narratives were used to communicate, interpret, facilitate meaning making, encourage a questioning attitude,

stimulate the imagination, make learning fun, and facilitate interaction. She uncovered her findings through the use of narrative analysis and their descriptive powers.

Interviewing Methods

Interviewing is one of the main methods for gathering data within the methodology of narrative analysis. For many researchers, interviewing is a basic mode of inquiry, and certain standards are followed.

Researchers using interviews to gather data must possess an interest in understanding the experiences of their participants and the meaning they make of those experiences.

Seidman (2006) said,

Being interested in others is the key to some of the basic assumptions underlying interviewing techniques. It requires that we interviewers keep our egos in check. It requires that we realize we are not the center of the world. It demands that our actions as interviewers indicate that others' stories are important. (p. 9)

Of utmost importance is that researchers realize the importance of the stories of each participant. This is why coding presents a unique set of challenges in interviewing, as researchers must break down stories for analysis.

In-depth, Phenomenological Interviewing Process

This study followed the recommendations of Seidman (2006), using the phenomenological interviewing approach for the research. Seidman proposed a series of three in-depth interviews. Interviewers use mainly open-ended questions to build upon participants' responses. The goal of the interview series is to have the participant reconstruct experiences for the topic being researched. Seidman explained the reasoning behind conducting three separate interviews is to keep the narratives in a context. People's behavior

is meaningful only when placed in the context of their own lives and those lives in the social world in which they interact.

In Seidman's (2006) series of interviews, the first interview is used to establish the context of the participant's experiences. At this time the researcher asks the participant to share as much about himself or herself as possible. The research focuses on asking "how" questions as opposed to "why" questions in order to gather that context for the situations they are describing. The second interview requires the participants to share concrete details of their experiences. At this time the researcher wants to hear about the details of the experiences, not opinions about what happened. Gathering the details about an experience helps the researcher build the story around the experience. The third interview is used to help the participants reflect on the meaning the experience held for them. Seidman explained this step as requiring that "participants look at how the factors in their lives interacted to bring them to their present situation. It also requires that they look at their present experience in detail and within the context in which it occurs" (p. 18).

According to Seidman (2006), if researchers follow this interview structure, the data gathered will be rich and complete. Each interview will build on the knowledge from the preceding one and will illuminate the data being gathered. "There is a logic to the interviews, and to lose control of their direction is to lose the power of that logic and the benefit from it" (Seidman, 2006, p. 19).

Seidman (2006) also recommended that each interview period be scheduled for a 90-minute time frame. He believed this amount of time is sufficient to gather the necessary data without imposing too much on a participant. He did not believe that a longer time span

allows a researcher to gather additional data of true value. The interviews should be conducted between three days to a week apart for the maximum benefit.

Types of Interviews

Esterberg (2002) identified several types of interviews including structured, semistructured, and unstructured.

Structured interviews. This type of interview is the most formal and controlled of all interview types. In this kind of interview, the specific questions, order of questions, even the tone used to ask the questions, are controlled for analysis purposes. The questions must be asked exactly as written, without any deviation by the interviewer. In the case that a participant does not understand a question, the interviewer must refrain from restating the question but, rather, must simply repeat the question exactly as written.

Semistructured interviews. These interviews are also referred to as in-depth interviews. In this type of interviews, an interviewer is allowed to explore a set topic more freely. An interviewer has a basic idea of the topics needed to be covered in each interview but has more freedom to follow the thoughts and experiences of the participant. In this type of interview, the interviewer must be an excellent listener, as he or she needs to follow the direction of the participant. Follow-up questions must be formed as the interview uniquely moves and flows.

Unstructured interviews. These interviews have the least amount of structure of all three types of interviews. These tend to be more spontaneous and free-flowing. Often they are conducted in conjunction with observations. In this situation, the interviewer does not have a set of questions to follow. Rather, she or he will typically ask questions about a

situation at hand or feelings from an experience. Esterberg (2002) described unstructured interviews as more of a “conversation.”

Among these three options, this study has been based on a series of semistructured interviews.

Researcher’s Positionality in Interviewing

The role of the interviewer, or researcher, is always a factor when analyzing the data. As with all qualitative research, the positionality of the interviewer needs to be closely considered. Every section of interviewing should aim to minimize the impact and influence of the interviewer. Seidman (2006) said, “No matter how diligently we work to that effect, however, the fact is that interviewers are a part of the interviewing picture. They ask questions, respond to the participant, and at times even share their own experiences” (p. 22).

In addition to this impact of positionality, the interviewer is most likely the same person to work with, select portions of , interpret, and analyze the data. All of these actions require choices on the part of the researcher.

The issues of validity, reliability and generalizability are faced by all qualitative researchers. If following a set standard, such as the three-interview protocol set forth by Seidman (2006), researchers add credibility to their research.

Participant Selection

Even the decision about which participants to interview involves research impact. Selection of participants is of utmost importance to the success of the research being undertaken. If the participants are not appropriate, the data gathered will not advance the research. The method of purposeful sampling is best used to select participants if random selection is not an option.

Esterberg (2002) indicated that participants can be chosen for the specific qualities they bring to the study. If one wishes to focus on female experiences or elderly perspectives, then a researcher will “purposefully” choose participants based on those characteristics.

Another technique used is that of snowball sampling or chain referral sampling. Using this technique, a researcher will start with the key participants exhibiting the characteristics being researched and then these participants will refer friends and acquaintances who also fit the sample characteristics.

How many participants should be included is an often-asked question. Seidman (2006) provided two criteria here: sufficiency and saturation. Sufficiency means that the number of participants reflects the range of the population being studied and that their stories will reflect a larger population. Saturation indicates that interviews being conducted are no longer producing fresh or new information. Seidman indicated that “enough is an interactive reflection of every step of the interview process and different for each study and each researcher” (p. 55).

For this study, a total of five participants were included. These participants were selected from a study that generated demographics of midwestern community colleges to determine which institutions employed female presidents. Criteria for selection were based upon being a female community college president who had completed a minimum of one year in the position of president, but had served for five years or less in that capacity so that she could vividly recollect the experiences of the first year.

Interview Preparation

Regardless of which interview type is chosen or how many participants are chosen, preparation is necessary for successful research. Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales

(2007) stated that a researcher must begin with one or two central questions. These questions must relate back to the overall qualitative study being undertaken. Esterberg (2002) advocated for establishing an interview guide to help focus the interviews. This guide should include the main topics, the wording of the questions to be asked, and some follow-up (probe) questions.

When preparing questions to be asked, Creswell et al. (2007) encouraged the use of “what” or “how” questions. These questions imply that the researcher is trying to gain understanding of a situation. He also used exploratory verbs such as discover, explore, describe, or report. These word choices evolve and change over the course of interviews.

Esterberg (2002) stated that researchers need to choose which types of questions to ask. She considered experiences and behaviors, opinions and values, feelings, factual knowledge, sensory experiences, and personal background. She saw that a mix of all types will produce rich data for the researcher.

Once the questions have been chosen, the order in which they are to be asked must be considered. Esterberg’s (2002) procedure for this was to brainstorm the entire list of potential questions to be used. She then grouped the questions according to topic and eliminated redundancy. At this point, she began to work on the phrasing of each particular question.

For the purpose of this study, I organized my interview questions around the established research questions. Three distinct sets of interview questions were compiled. The first set of questions focused on the family life and educational achievements of the participant. The second set of questions focused on professional work experience. Participants were asked to describe their work specifically in the field of education. I framed

questions to delve into work in the community college system. Questions about successes, hurdles and obstacles, and mentoring also were included in this section. The final set of questions focused on advice for other females in the community college system and any topics I had not already addressed that the participant wanted to add.

Interviews

Interviews took place at the place of employment of each community college president as well as via telephone. Each of the interviews in the series lasted from 30 to 120 minutes. Participants were told prior to participating that the three interviews would last from 60 to 90 minutes. The first interviews took the least amount of time, from 30 to 60 minutes. Prior to beginning the interview, I made sure I had reserved the appropriate amount of time for the participant's schedule. However, one of the second interviews ran well over the allotted 90 minutes. This participant preferred to continue the interview, even after the scheduled time limit had elapsed.

The semistructured interview model was used. The list of questions for each interview was used as a guideline. Each participant was allowed the freedom to share stories about topics not addressed. Follow-up questions were formulated as each interview progressed.

Within two days after each interview, I completed transcription from the tape-recorded interviews. The use of a professional transcriptionist was considered; however I felt at this time that completing the transcription myself would allow me to become more intimately familiar with the data. Complete replay of the interview was conducted a minimum of three times to ensure accuracy of the transcription. A copy of the transcript was then electronically supplied to each participant for her to make any additions or corrections.

This process of member checking allowed each participant the opportunity to clarify or correct any misunderstandings or errors.

Coding of the Data

Once the interviews in a study are completed, a researcher needs to begin making sense of all the data gathered. The first step is coding. Open coding and focused coding can be used. Open coding, according to Esterberg (2002) involves working intensively with the data line by line and identifying themes and categories. The researcher is open to all categories and themes at this point. Focused coding also includes going through the data line by line, but focusing on the key themes that have been identified during the open coding. The important aspect of coding to keep in mind is that a researcher will become extremely familiar with all of the data collected.

For the purposes of this study, I employed the technique of open coding following data collection. This technique allowed themes to develop and surface within the data itself.

Goodness and Trustworthiness

In order to ensure goodness and trustworthiness, I employed numerous strategies recommended by Merriam (2002). These included (a) an audit trail, (b) member checking, (c) peer review, (d) positionality, and (e) rich, thick description.

An audit trail, according to Merriam (2002), is a detailed account of how the data were gathered. This was completed at every step of data collection. Dates, times, and notes were maintained throughout the process.

Through member checks, participants are given the opportunity to ensure accuracy and credibility of the data gathered prior to the study's completion (Creswell, 1998). I conducted a member check after the completion of the semistructured interviews. Each

participant was provided an electronic copy of all interview transcriptions with the opportunity to make any additions or corrections.

A peer review was defined by Merriam (2002) as having a colleague scan the data to assess whether the findings are fitting with the study being undertaken. A peer review of this study was held with colleagues following the interview transcription. At this time, theme development was discussed and suggestions were made and implemented.

Positionality is an additional strategy for a researcher to ensure goodness and trustworthiness of the data. Positionality is accomplished when “researchers are called upon to articulate and clarify their assumptions, experiences, worldview and theoretical orientation to the study” (Merriam, 2002, p. 26). I drafted my personal positionality statement prior to beginning the research process. This document was referred to frequently throughout the research process.

Finally, rich and thick description is used throughout the exemplar quotes in both the findings section (chapter 4) and the summary, conclusions, and recommendations section (chapter 5) of this dissertation. Through the use of rich and thick description, I attempted to provide statements for readers to feel as if they could have experienced or closely understand the life stories of each participant.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

Introduction

Five participants agreed to participate in this study. Data were collected through a series of semistructured interviews both in person and via the telephone. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Interview questions were developed to support the following research questions:

1. How do female community college presidents describe their pathways to a presidency position?
2. How do female community college presidents view prior training, mentoring, and educational opportunities that led to successful experiences during the first year as a community college president?
3. How do female community college presidents view their experiences during their first year in that position?
4. How do female community college presidents explain any voids or deficiencies in their career pathway that made achieving success during their first year more challenging?

The results of the interviews with the five participants are presented in this chapter. In order to maintain the anonymity of each participant, pseudonyms are used. Other names and locations that might also reveal the identity of a participant are omitted or changed for the same purpose. All participants requested to remain anonymous throughout the study. An overview of the participants' backgrounds are provided in Table 1.

Table 1.

Overview of Participants

Name	Age	Birth order in family	Highest educational degree	Faculty experience	First female president at her institution
Sarah	Mid-50s	Youngest with 3 older brothers	Ph.D.	Yes	Yes
Mary	Early-60s	Eldest with 1 brother and 1 sister	Ed.D.	Yes	No
Nancy	Mid-50s	Eldest with 1 brother	Ph.D.	Yes	Yes
Cathy	Early-60s	Eldest with 4 sisters and 3 brothers	Ph.D.	Yes	No
Helen	Mid-50s	Eldest with 2 brothers	Ph.D.	Yes	No

Sarah's Story

Sarah was a community college president in her mid-50s. She was the youngest child in her family growing up. Her family included her father and mother, who both had eighth grade educations, and three older brothers. Although she was the youngest, she said, "Since I was the only girl, I often felt like the oldest because I was the often the caretaker in the family." Her parents were always supportive of whatever goals and aspirations any of their children had. Her parents were farmers during the Depression era. She remembers how hard her parents and siblings worked to make a living. Her father passed away when she was in her early 20s, and her mother was called upon to do much of the manual labor on the farm.

Sarah's parents were neutral on the idea of education. "They were always supportive of what I wanted to do, but they never pushed me to continue on to college," Sarah noted. So when she chose to get married at 18, soon after being valedictorian of her high school class, her parents thought that was "great." She used her business skills from high school classes to

gain employment as a secretary/bookkeeper in a local business. When she had her first child she quit working to stay at home. Sarah commented, “In those days when you had children, you quit your job and stayed home to be a mother, and so that is what I did.”

Her brothers took some courses at a community college, and then they became involved with the farming operation and trucking. Sarah said that, at the time, farming was a way of life for her family, and education was not vital to their success, adding,

When my father passed away, I realized that people didn’t live forever. I had thought about going back to school for quite a while and decided I shouldn’t wait any longer.

I knew that a college education would open doors for me.

At this point she had two young children (ages 1 and 3). She wanted to go back to school and earn a degree so she would be able to support herself and her family if she was ever placed in that situation.

Sarah said that the decision to return to school while being a mother with small children at this time was not an easy choice. She added, “I was able to take advantage of the Pell Grant, but there was no online options, no cohort type programs, just the traditional style classroom options.” She made her choice of college and began commuting back and forth every day to attend classes. She wasn’t really sure of what degree she wanted to attain, so she began with business courses. She spent five years completing her bachelor’s degree in accounting and business economics.

Her mother and her husband supported Sarah wholeheartedly. Her mother was a widow and loved watching Sarah’s children during the day. Sarah’s children also spent much time on the tractor with their father. Sarah acknowledged she would not have been successful without the support of her mother and husband: “Once I started back, I realized

how much I enjoyed being a student. I love learning. I am a life-long learner. And once I got started again, I didn't stop."

Because Sarah wasn't really sure about what she wanted to do when she graduated, she decided to add a teaching certificate to her coursework. She thought teaching would be a good way to support her family. Her business teacher in high school had been a role model for her. She thought he would probably be retiring soon and that job would open up and would be a good fit for her. Because ended up not being an option when she graduated, she began substituting teaching and doing other part-time work in the area. She also began teaching several courses at the local community college. Once she gained full-time status as an instructor at the community college, she began her master's degree program. Once Sarah decided to begin the master's program, she made the choice to pursue it one course at a time. No cohort programs were available to her. She said,

It was difficult to choose where to go for this degree, because I would have to commute again. I knew I wanted to get finished as soon as possible, but with my family, I could only commute one night a week.

The master's degree wasn't required for the job she currently held, but Sarah was always thinking about the future, wanting to be prepared for the next opportunity, and continuing as a life-long learner. She commented, "I love learning. I love taking classes. I love teaching other people. Although I didn't need this degree at this point, I thought it was good for me to stretch myself and be ready for that next challenge."

Once again, it took about five years for Sarah to complete this degree. Upon completion, she continued to teach and take on new assignments. The opportunity to attend a

leadership development program was offered, and Sarah took advantage of this: “Once again this was an opportunity that presented itself, and so I went and continued my learning.”

Although Sarah was developing her leadership capabilities at this point, she said being a community college president, or even an administrator, was not in her plan at all: “I told everyone that I enjoyed being a faculty member, and that is where I wanted to stay. I wanted to do my job [teaching] and help out, but I was not interested in administration at all. I loved teaching.”

When Sarah was serving as the chief academic officer she entertained thoughts of being a president someday.

I have always been happy in whatever position I was in. So, really didn’t think about what I wanted to do next. I was happy where I was. But then a door would open, and I would think that because it opened I probably should walk through.

Others kept telling her that she could take on new responsibilities and be successful at it.

With the encouragement of family and friends, Sarah continued to grow and stretch herself.

Then with some retirements at her institution, a vice president position was offered to Sarah. She realized that this would be another opportunity to stretch herself, “so I decided this would be a good fit for me at this time. I skipped over the whole role of dean, but I decided this was an opportunity I could not pass up.” As a vice president, Sarah decided she should probably think about another degree, so she began her Ph.D. program. For this degree she had the option of being a member of a cohort program. She noted, “This was a wonderful way to work through the degree. We could all support each other. It was wonderful.”

Also at this time, Sarah was recommended to serve as acting president when the president at her institution retired. The other vice presidents planned on applying for the presidential position, so she was a good choice to serve in the interim. This lasted for about six months until a new president was hired. An early retirement option was offered by the new president to one of the vice presidents, who then chose to retire. This opened up a new vice president position that Sarah took in order to broaden her knowledge base. She added,

When I was selected for this new position, the board really liked my length of years with our institution. They had seen me work for years, and knew that I was well versed with many areas of the college. They liked my stability and the fact that I knew the culture of our communities very well.

After Sarah had served in this position for approximately four years, the current president retired. A search was conducted, and Sarah was the only internal candidate who applied for the position of president. She went through an intensive interview process for the position of president. Sarah commented on the challenges of being an internal candidate:

Being an internal candidate, people all know everything you have done. They know every good thing and hard decision you have had to make. So, people knew me because I had been here for years and years. But this was also in my favor because the board members had seen what I did in the classroom, in the labs, in academics, in management. They knew I had a background with variety. And they also wanted my stability. They knew I was not leaving this area. I grew up here and plan on staying here.

Sarah also knew that a community college was the right fit for her. She knew that she loved education, and a 4-year institution would have been fine. However, once she

connected with the mission of a community college, she was hooked, as she described: “The mission of the community college just seemed to resonate with me. I have a special bond with the career and technical education, and I enjoy helping build a skilled workforce.”

Although Sarah never really planned on becoming president, now that she was in this role she was enjoying it:

I love it. It’s a very challenging job. My husband gets after me because my phone is next to the bed. And if I happen to wake up in the night and think of something I might check my phone. I do feel responsible at all times. Being a president is a huge responsibility. And I truly care about all of our students.

One of the areas she wished she had more training in prior to becoming president was fundraising. She had been exposed to so much of the college experience through her previous positions, she felt comfortable with these areas, but she added, “Fundraising will be my biggest challenge. I don’t like asking people for money, but for a good cause I will. I just wish I had more training in this area.”

Sarah was the first female president at her institution. She said this never really occurred to her until she saw the announcement in the news stories: “When I first read about me in my new position, I thought, ‘Oh, yes, I guess this is news. I’m the first female president of our institution.’” Although she didn’t focus on this aspect, she realized that members of the public did notice. She described,

I’ve just recently had someone tell me that the college is now run by women. I know that is in direct reference to me, but they are probably also noticing more women in leadership roles. We do have a good blend of gender right now with the vice

presidents and deans. But sometimes I think it is harder for an older generation to accept these changes.

Although Sarah said she didn't focus on her femininity, she did consider her choices carefully. She admitted to double thinking her clothing choices for certain meetings. She didn't wear as many dresses and skirts, but generally chose pants and suits. She elaborated,

I think I do tend to dress less feminine than some of my friends. But that is more my nature. I came from a childhood where I cared a lot about what people thought and said about me all the way through high school. When I became an adult I realized that you can't always worry about what other people say and think. I learned that you have to be comfortable in your own skin. What others think of you doesn't make the person. So, I am who I am, and I don't tend to think about male or female. But every once in a while I am a woman, and I'll get out my red power suit with a skirt and that feels good too.

Sarah believed that the bigger challenge to her upon becoming president was the fact that she was an internal candidate. She did not have six months to a year to get to know everyone. Because she already knew the institutions, its people, and its culture, she felt that expectations of her were high from the very beginning. She noted,

I have always been very consistent, very fair, very matter of fact and logical. Since that is how people have always seen me; that is what they expect from me. They have watched me make hard decisions in the past, and so they knew how I would react. That was very important to my success.

Part of Sarah's leadership style was being a servant leader. Helping others had always been a part of her background. She said this leadership style had always been a part of her and she did not change once she became a community college president, adding:

Helping others is just a part of my background, has always been a part of my background. And now I'm in a position where I can really help people, especially students. Even though I can't be personally with them every day, I can truly help them.

She admitted that servant leadership is not an "easy" leadership style to follow.

It takes a lot of strength to follow this type of leadership. I enjoy getting coffee for others in the room and pass the plates around when we have food, not because I'm a woman but because I believe in servant leadership. I am here to serve other people, and so I take on this role myself as a leader.

Servant leadership was not the only leadership style Sarah was using. Occasionally she has needed to implement a top-down approach. Someone needs to make a decision at the end of the day, and Sarah acknowledged she is willing to do so:

You have to remember that no decision is also a decision. That helped me realize that I need to make a decision in a timely manner. I love to analyze data. I can look at all the variables and put it together in 100 different ways. But in the end, you have to take the data you have at the time and make the decision. I always tell myself that this won't be the last decision. We can always adjust if necessary.

Fitting with her servant leadership style, Sarah described her organizational model as a flower. She placed herself and the board in the center and the organization grew out from there. She said it is more of a network, not a hierarchy, adding, "We all have different

responsibilities. And we all have people who supervise us. But we need to network and make decisions at the lowest possible level. That makes a strong organization.”

She shared that communication, climate control, and parking were some of the most problematic issues at institutions. But she was not responsible for making decisions for all of the issues; many of those decisions were in the capable hands of people closer to the situation than herself.

Her leadership style has remained consistent, but her personality profile has changed somewhat. She admitted that she was a total introvert and people pleaser 20 years ago. Over time she has made a conscious decision to modify some of these traits in order to be more successful in her career: “Over time I have just grown into my skin.” But she added that one can’t drastically change just because one has changed positions:

Just because I’m a president doesn’t mean I have to make major changes just for that sake. Being president means that I have a broader responsibility. Now that I’m comfortable with my personality, I am careful not to let the position change me too much.

Sarah saw her first year in the position of president as successful. She defined success as moving forward in a positive direction. One of her goals was to hold people accountable. And she believed that had taken place, as she commented:

My success has been in listening, learning and leading. I am enjoying the ride, the journey. Success always goes back to the students. I focus on the rewards we have when we work with our students and help them achieve their goals.

Celebrating success also was important to Sarah. When a new semester began and enrollment was good, she said they had an Olympic-style celebration:

We had flags, we had music, we had food. I think it is important to let everyone know when we together have done a good job. And then I celebrate at the end of the day by putting my feet up, enjoying some good food, and keeping my laptop close so I'm still connected. I always say—enjoy!

Her first year was not without challenges. Her biggest challenge was to get everyone to embrace the use of data. She stated,

Data makes people nervous. But it is the age in which we live. We need to have the data and then use the data. The outside world expects us to look at the data so we can continuously improve. We are in a new normal. We are not the schools we were 5 to 10 years ago. Data can be scary. It can show us some things that aren't as good as we want them to be. And it can show us where we need to improve. But we have to collect data and then use it to make better decisions. This has been a challenge for me with my staff this first year.

A personal challenge for Sarah was realizing that she needed to reach outside the college for friendships. She noted, "I have to be careful because people are always watching if I favor one person over another. Even though I'm not like that, people are always watching. So I establish a network outside of the college."

Having mentors throughout her career was an important aspect. Although some mentors found her and some occurred naturally, she stressed that females need to reach out and develop these relationships. Nearly every mentor she had was a male. She said that until became a college president, and she had sought out other female presidents as mentors, all of her prior mentors were male. Sarah thought she was just naturally drawn to the personalities of the mentors who whom she has worked. She added:

I think it takes a lot to be a female mentor to a female. I think we are always a bit competitive with each other. Sad to say, but I think that we females are a bit unsure of how to work with the competition between each other. I can't really describe it, but the competition is different with males.

Because Sarah valued the importance of mentoring, she herself was currently a mentor to several people. She was working with both a male and a female who were advancing in their careers. She found it rewarding to hear later how she might have had a positive impact on someone's life.

As to sharing advice with mentees, Sarah said,

My parents told me I could do whatever I wanted to do. So I tell people do what you dream. Don't be afraid to take a risk. But help others, serve others. Put together a team of good people. Then you can all work together and deal with whatever comes your way. If you are not a lifelong learner, you don't belong in education. We are here to help develop people.

Mary's Story

Mary was a community college president in her early 60s. She was the eldest of three children and grew up in urban area with a lot of diversity. She was the second generation of her family born in this country. Her grandparents immigrated to this area. Her grandmother had a college degree in French and her grandfather had an eighth grade education. Theirs was an arranged marriage. Her father had a college education, and her mother did not. Her father worked in mid- to upper-level management for many years. He then quit and started his own business with his brother. Her mother wanted to be a cosmetologist but became engaged at 18, married at 19, and had her first child at 20.

Mary's family did not view education as a high priority for her. Mary said it was her idea to continue on to college after high school. However, she did think that her parents were harder on her brother and sister to attend college after she did:

I think they were much harder on my brother after I had gone to college. I had uncles who would say to my father, "Why are you sending your daughter to school? She will just end up married anyway. You should save your money for your son."

Mary admitted that most of her classmates in high school had dreams only for marriage and family:

For as long as I can remember, all of my friends ever wanted was to get married and have a family. And all I ever wanted to do was go to school. So, I was very lucky that I had a progressive father who supported me in anything that I did.

She was fortunate that she attended one of the best high schools in the state. Mary was in the first graduating class from the facility. She noted,

The counselors encouraged me. I had good grades and was in accelerated programs. The only argument between my parents and the high school was that the counselors wanted me to go to a large university, and my father thought it was too liberal. So, we settled on a smaller institution. I was just happy to be able to go on to school.

Mary always knew she wanted to be a teacher. She began college as an English major. After her freshman year she ran into her kindergarten teacher and, as Mary described:

She asked me what I was studying. I told her English. She told me that English teachers were a dime a dozen and I needed to choose a different major. That was hard for me because I grew up speaking a foreign language. Back then I could not attend school until I could speak English. And I learned it very quickly. I love this

language. But I did take her advice and switched to business education with an English minor.

One of Mary's vivid memories of childhood was that of assigned reading groups in the elementary school. She continued,

The bluebirds were the highest level reading group, the yellow birds were the average, and the red birds needed help. Of course I started out with the red birds. But everybody would help me at home. So each year of school I would move up a color until I finally was a blue bird. My family was so proud of me. My dad painted my room blue and my mother bought me a blue dress. Everyone in my family supported me in reaching this goal in reading. I think that to this day, blue is still my favorite color.

After Mary completed her bachelor's degree, she began teaching. She remembered her salary was \$9,000 a year, adding that it was "the second highest salary in the state. I was very proud of that, and I stayed here for four years." It was also during this time that Mary began teaching at a local community college. She decided she wanted to increase her pay level and the only way to do that was increased education. So she also began working on her master's degree on a part-time basis.

Mary knew that she would not want to teach forever, so she chose to earn a master's degree in business. Once she completed this degree, she realized that she did not enjoy teaching six sections of the same class every day. She said she became bored with this and began looking for new opportunities. She was able to gain employment with a statewide organization in curriculum and articulation agreements between community colleges and high schools. She held this position for about eight years.

Once again, her love of learning prompted her to return to college, this time for a professional certificate in training and development. While she was pursuing this, she met the man she would eventually marry. She was required to complete several internships for this certificate, and one of the companies hired her for full-time employment. For several years she worked in the IT department and gained a wealth of business knowledge.

Several of her former colleagues recommended her for a job as a dean at a local college. She was thrilled to return to education and accepted the job when it was offered to her. By this time she was married, and about five years later their son was born. This was an eventful year for Mary: her son was born, she began working on her doctorate, and she was diagnosed with cancer.

She continued to work as the dean. She described herself as an innovator: “When I first arrived on this job, I was the first one to get a computer. I didn’t know what to do without a computer, and most of my colleagues didn’t know what to do with one.” Most of the other deans at the institution were male. Mary said the other female dean was in charge of the nursing program and was much older and close to retirement, adding, “So I was the minority female, and certainly the youngest one of the group also.”

Mary knew that she wanted to be a chief academic officer and that she could never achieve this dream without earning a doctorate. She began her doctorate program as part of a cohort that was about half male and half female. She commented,

I almost quit the program because my doctors were worried about my stress level.

My husband, who has always been very supportive, told me that I would be very sorry I quit when everyone else in my cohort group was finishing and I wasn’t. He convinced me to continue. The year of my chemotherapy I did not receive straight

As, but I did make it through with the help of my friends and husband. He would take our small son and work with him and play with him for hours so I could study.

Mary's next professional position was vice president of academic affairs. She was in this position when she completed her doctorate and remained there for about 15 years. Throughout these 15 years, she continued to add to her job duties. She said, "When the vice president of student services retired, I took on those responsibilities also. At this point my title was the senior vice president for academic and student affairs. I really got a lot of experiences this way."

The institution at which Mary was working underwent vast changes. The mission and vision was changing and mergers were occurring. She said her boss was a great person to work for throughout all of this change:

By this time I had a reputation of getting things done. And so I was lucky to have a boss who basically let me run things the way I wanted to. He just knew that I would take care of my areas and he could concentrate on all other areas of the college. He was the one who eventually encouraged me to apply for presidencies. He truly supported me through the whole process. We are still friends today.

Mary admitted that she did not begin applying for presidencies soon enough. She stated,

I had been at this institution for so long that it was generally assumed that I would get the presidency, and it was set up that way. And then, stuff happened and I didn't get it when the position came open. I really hadn't practiced and prepared my materials enough. I was unhappy because I didn't think the finalists were as qualified as I was.

The finalists were both male and female, so it was not a gender issue Mary was facing. She continued,

However, I knew that I quickly had to gear up and put myself into interviewing mode and look elsewhere. This took me a while. Several times I was a finalist, and others a semifinalist. Then an interim position came open, and so I applied for that.

Mary was selected for this position; however, she knew that this choice made her ineligible for the permanent presidency position. Therefore, she interviewed all over the country. She described,

By now I was a finalist about every place I applied to. I was so busy applying, I really didn't keep track of the search process at my institution. The next thing I know is that the search [for the permanent president] is dismissed, and I get a call from the chancellor asking if I would accept the position of president on a permanent basis.

Although this was unusual, and a surprise to Mary, she accepted this position. She had tremendous support from community members, faculty, and staff members.

Mary was not the first female president at her institution. Her immediate predecessor also was female. Mary noted, "Up until then, the school had been led by male presidents. My personality was so very different from the female before me that we were not really compared as female to female."

Mary didn't think that, being a female, she was judged by different standards because she had so much support from so many people. She elaborated,

Comments were made that so many people had worked really hard to get me in this position. And I don't think it really mattered that I was a female, just that I was

different than the female prior to me. My characteristics and style were what people evaluated.

In addition to her doctoral work, Mary also took advantage of other opportunities. She participated in a presidential leadership academy that AACCC held. She also participated in leadership academies offered by her state. She continually sought out conference and seminars that were helpful to her professional growth. In addition, she added,

My former boss made sure I was very up-to-date on everything. He was a great mentor. He made sure I got the experiences I needed to develop professionally. He gave me skills in this area. I also think that being a chief academic officer for so many years was probably the best training I had.

Mary identified that fundraising was an area in which she had minimal training and wished she had more. However, she felt well prepared in the majority of areas and skills she needed to be successful. She indicated,

What is very important is the decision-making process. You also need to remember all of the skills we learn in kindergarten about treating others fairly and how you would like to be treated. So, when I got this job in my early 60s, I had an entire career, experiences, and education that shaped who I was and prepared me well for this position.

Mary described herself as an authentic leader: “someone who accomplishes things, expands possibilities, participates in life, is trustworthy and honest. This is a person who makes situational decisions and is collaborative. This is the type of leader I think I am.” Mary said that her leadership style has been consistent and had not changed since she became president. She said simply that this is who she was and this was her character.

Servant leadership was also a term Mary used to describe her philosophy: “There is no room for ego in this job. It’s a servant leadership position. And if you’re not comfortable with that you’re probably not going to make it.”

Her mentors included family members and supervisors. She began with her father, who supported her in everything she did and wanted to do. Also, her grandmother and mother were strong women. She commented,

I was brought up to understand that I could do anything. I was a sickly child and when you sit on the couch and watch the world just go by, you get frustrated because you want to be out there in the world. So, I’m just thankful to be alive and to have meaningful work.

One of the most significant challenges Mary had to face in her position of president was repairing the relationships with the communities her institution serves. She stated,

With all of the mergers, unmergers, and remergers, the communities were confused. They had been through so many changes. We had four campuses and not one strategic plan. Each campus was pretty much doing everything on its own. We needed to work together. There was competition among and between all the campuses. So I developed a general advisory committee comprised of community members from each area and developed a unified voice for the institution together.

Mary knew that she had to repair the relationship, put together an organizational structure, and come up with a plan in which everybody could move forward together. Mary’s attitude was that a lot of work needed to be done, and she had better get going on it, as she stated, “My reputation was to get things done. A lot of people think it was miraculous that I was able to accomplish so much in a short period of time.”

Success was defined as achieving the goals of repairing the relationships, re-establishing the organization structure and developing a strategic plan. She stated, “When these things were accomplished, I knew we were a success.” Celebrating the success was a challenge because not everyone thought these changes were a success. She continued,

So once again I had to build relationships. We began doing things that we had never done before. We began having meetings each week, and leaders from each campus attended. During the holidays, I had a party for the staff and I paid for it myself. I make sure that everyone knows we are successful as one of the largest colleges in the state, but individually we are at the bottom. So this success is a culture that is growing.

Success to Mary also meant taking care of oneself. She admitted that she should work out more and eat healthier, but most important was to have a life outside of your job. She commented,

You need to have relationships with your family and extended family and friends.

When you go on vacation, you need to go on vacation. It is important to take time for yourself and relax. You have to realize that you are not perfect and will make mistakes.

Females to do have some unique challenges while moving through professional positions. Mary said that choices are important for females:

I didn’t get married until I was 32. So a lot happened early for me. I only focused on myself for 32 years. Once you are married, you have to make sure that your spouse or significant other has the same values and will support you. And you have to make sure you know you can’t do everything at once. I see so many young people who

think that by the time they are 40 they need to be a president, have 10 kids, and be on every committee in the community. You can't do that. By the time I got married and had a child, I was doing the same job I had been doing for many years. And then unexpected things come up, like cancer.

Mary also said that, in their professional life, females have to make choices centered around a marriage. She had a commuter marriage because her career and her spouse's career did not have positions in the same community. She admitted that this was difficult, especially when her child was younger. She and her spouse were able to live together when he was able to secure employment in the community where she worked. Being able to share the demands of parenting was important for her professional development also. Mary knew that part of the reason for her not applying for presidencies earlier in her career was due to her family, saying.

I did not interview for many years because I wanted to be home for my child. My husband was traveling all the time and someone needed to be home with our child. I'm glad that I did that. I would do it again. And I would not have forced two parents traveling all the time on him. That was my decision, and it was the best for my family. After my son was in college, then I was free to do some things that I was not able to do when he was a young child.

Females need to support other females, according to Mary. She stated, "Most women don't support each other, and that's not a good thing." This sentiment became obvious to Mary when she sat on an interviewing committee. She said that nearly every female on the committee wanted to hire a male candidate only because he was a male. She commented,

“You see males support each other all the time. They support each other without being jealous. Females need to do so much more of this with each other.”

Mary had decided to work on this through mentoring. She knew that, without mentors, she would not have accomplished nearly as much. She explained,

I’ve made it a point to mentor females regardless of what they look like or how many kids they have or how they dress or whether or not they share my tastes. I think we need to do this. These things shouldn’t matter. It is more about females supporting each other.

What Mary looked for when choosing a person to mentor is someone with a good mind and ambition to want to do something new and challenging, saying, “We all have met people who find a job they like and can stay there and be happy forever. I look for people who have the ability to move forward.”

At the present, Mary was working closely with a female and mentoring her as she moved through her career stages. Mary said that this mentee was working on her doctorate. She was in a new administrative position. She had three young children and a husband. Mary noted, “The number one thing I tell someone in this position is that you simply can’t do everything. You have to make choices and decide what you need to be working on at each stage.”

The next thing Mary impressed upon those she mentors is that if you need to be liked, this isn’t the job for you. She will share examples of times she had to make hard decisions. She added,

A lot of people will not like you when you need to make decisions for your job.

People will not like you or your decisions all the time. And I think this is particularly

difficult for women. If you need to be liked and praised all the time, a presidency will be extremely difficult for you.

Mary believed that society was becoming a more gender-neutral society. She elaborated on this point,

I see some really effective female community college presidents and I see some really effective male presidents. And I hope that someday it will not matter if you are male or female. What will matter is that you are simply the right person for the job.”

Nancy’s Story

Nancy was a community college president in her mid-50s. She and her younger brother immigrated to this country when she was 5 years old. Her mother was an elementary school teacher before they immigrated but was unable to teach in this country. She did have a 2-year college degree. Her father was a small business owner who attended college for three years but didn’t complete his degree. He had to go to work and assist his father and never had the opportunity to return to college and earn his degree.

Nancy always knew that she would attend college, saying, “There was never any question about my brother and I attending college. My parents decided that we would both continue on in school and that was it. Never any questions about it.” Going on in school was what Nancy always wanted. She loved school from the moment she began, and she took advantage of every opportunity. She explained, “I did what I needed to do. I was a good student, really involved in service clubs, extracurricular activities, all that kind of stuff.”

Nancy began working when she was a sophomore in high school and continued working through her high school years. In the fall after high school graduation she became a

full-time college student. Discussions with her parents on what to major in led her to choose business. She noted,

It was the mid-70s and the economy was terrible. I had talked about getting an education for social work, and you know, as parents do, they told me that I wasn't going to make any money in that field. There really wasn't a need to teachers at that time, so no jobs there either. So my baccalaureate degree is in business.

After graduating from college, Nancy began working. She worked for several years and decided that business was not the occupation for her. She then returned to college to complete her teaching credential. She described,

When I went to register, my advisor told me my best option would be to attend a community college and finish. She said a community college would be much less expensive. At that point in my life I had no idea what a community college was. So, I went to a community college. Since I needed to work to support myself, I took a job working in the disability service office. It was here that I fell in love with community colleges.

While Nancy was working in this position, she was fortunate in that fact that both the coordinator and assistant coordinator quit at the same time and she was offered the job as coordinator. Nancy began as the coordinator of the disability services and was promoted to director. She kept this job for approximately five years, during which time she also returned to school for her master's degree in counseling with a goal of becoming a full-time counselor and instructor at a community college. Upon completion of her master's degree, Nancy began a new job at a different community college, where she stayed for 15 years.

In those 15 years, Nancy held many different positions, eventually becoming the vice president of student development. She also began her family and started work on her doctorate degree. She elaborated,

I was working full time, had brand new twins, and went back to school. That was a great plan I had. But the program was in a cohort format and it was amazing! I knew that if I wanted to move on, that I would need this degree. So in a way this was a strategic choice. I had a colleague with a young child, and we sat down together and decided to do this together. In the cohort we were all were very busy, and we all had kids. The women were actually the first ones to finish the program.

In addition to learning as much as she could through work experiences, Nancy also attended trainings to prepare her for a position of president. She attended the League for Innovation Executive Leadership Institute. This is where she says she decided she definitely wanted to be a community college president. She commented,

This opportunity really confirmed for me that I did want to become a president. Some of my classmates made the decision that they did not want to become a president. I thought about how I enjoy new challenges, and I'll get an itch for new and different responsibilities. I realized that I could pull on my experiences from many years in the community college system, and I would have the ability to make a difference, to guide an institution forward.

Training sessions included critiquing each other's resumes and holding mock interviews. Nancy found practicing this to be invaluable as she wondered what the interview process would be like. Another aspect of this training was all of the discussion on whether one fit with a large school or a small school. She said,

I didn't really appreciate how important that was back then. I wanted to be in a small school, and they warned me about being in a small school in a small community.

They said you will be one of the key leaders in the community. And that is so true!

But it is also very tiring. Because you go to the grocery store, and if you show up in your sweats with no makeup on, they still know you. And the college is always in the newspaper.

Other training opportunities for Nancy included the National Council of Student Development. Nancy went through the training and became a faculty member of this organization. Then she was a lead faculty member. She noted,

That was an incredible experience for me, not just being a student in it, but also being a faculty in it. This was a big part of my training. You don't always have to be a student. Remember that if you teach, you have to know a whole lot about the subject. So that was a very helpful experience for me."

Nancy also became involved with AACC. She was not only a member, but also volunteered to help in any way she could.

Nancy said that these professional development opportunities were not required for her, but rather she chose to participate in them. For many of these opportunities, she needed the support of her supervisor; however, she took the first step and requested the permission to attend.

One area she wished she had more training in was fundraising. She stated, "Fundraising still was one of those areas I was not confident in. So within the first few months of being a community college president, I went to training for presidents on fundraising. That was very helpful."

Her years of experience in senior management were extremely valuable for Nancy in her presidency, as she commented, “I don’t think you can really separate training and experience. Both my training and experience together were important to my success.”

Nancy was the first female president at the institution where she currently was serving as president. That came with its own set of challenges. She described,

One of my board members, who really is wonderful, was very adamant that the college not have a woman president. The other board members kind of turned her around and told her to not look at the candidates as male or female, but look at qualifications. So, I did have a unanimous vote. But I also knew that one board member was not looking at me through the eyes of my experience and education, but through the eyes of can *she* do this job. I’ve also had community members come up to me and say that they are really unsure about the board’s selection of a woman for this position. They put it all right out on the table for me.

Prior to Nancy assuming the presidency, the institution had been led by very strong males with top-down leadership styles. She noted,

It is kind of creepy that I know my predecessors quite well. And all of them are very strong personalities. They would all say that about themselves. I still have times where people in the community will make comments not about my actions as a president, but the fact that I’m a woman.

Most often Nancy chose not to respond to these comments. If she did respond, she would turn the conversation around to discuss a particular decision that was made at the college or some action that had been taken. She elaborated,

If I try to defend my womanhood, I'm not sure that for these people it would make any difference. But I do know that I've had people come up to me and say that they were very skeptical when I came, but now that I've seen what you do, I'm really glad you're here. So I've got feedback from people in the community who think I'm doing what needs to be done, and my board has shown me absolutely great support. I have the best board."

Although Nancy freely admitted that she felt held to different standards than her male predecessors, she laughed and said she had not yet figured out what the standards are—just different. She had been asked to be more accountable, and she believed the institution was more accountable than ever before. She had been asked to make very hard decisions about the future of the institution, and she believed she had followed through on that. She added,

I'm not the conflict avoider that my male predecessors were. I handle conflict differently. Some people get mad and yell and scream. But the problem is still there and nothing was changed. My accountability is putting out very clear expectations and agreeing to changes. I let people know what the problem is, and we talk about it. I don't like pots boiling and then boiling over.

Nancy described her leadership style as that of empowerment. She strongly believed in having a strong team, supporting them, and helping team members to get the development opportunities they need to work well together. She stated,

I believe that every person needs to have an accountability. We are accountable for the success of our students. Every person has a role in the success of our students so we talk a lot about that with everyone, from admission counselors to our custodians to our faculty.

Prior to Nancy becoming president, the top-down management style was prevalent at her college. When she began her presidency, she would put a question out for discussion, and the majority of people around the table would automatically assume that she had made a decision. Rather, she was looking for discussion and problem-solving sessions. Nancy, said,

People would come up to me and tell me to make the decision because I was the president. That's not exactly how I work. I don't even work that way at home. I ask for opinions and ideas. That leads to more discussion, and together we will work to make the best possible decision. After I had completed my first year in the presidency, I went back to the community and said that they had asked for more involvement in the decision-making process. So I told them, don't stand out in the parking lot looking in the building. Come on in the door and participate.

This was all a culture change for the community—one Nancy is proud to have facilitated.

Challenges surrounded Nancy during her first year. She described the economy of her community as in recession. The stock market had crashed, and businesses were laying off people from work. She had to cut budgets significantly. She also had been unable to sell her house, and her family had stayed behind until a sale was made. Nancy relied heavily on her past community college experiences to get her through. She knew that her trusted and tested strategies would work well. She explained,

I went to the people of the college and people of the community to determine what their priorities were. They wanted to minimize the number of layoffs. They wanted to preserve the quality and excellence of the education provided. And they wanted to serve community and business partners.

Even though these were huge challenges, Nancy was able to achieve success. She defined her success of the first year by showing that the college was able to meet these challenges head on. Success was changing culture and moving forward with the institution.

Mentors were important to Nancy as she moved through her career. She had had both male and female mentors. Each mentor encouraged her and helped her through difficult times. She was able to go to her mentors and ask about specific situations and gather ideas to help her make a decision. Some of the mentors chose her, and others she recruited. Either way, Nancy was emphatic that females need to take advantage of mentors.

Nancy currently was mentoring a female at her institution. She described, I have worked with this female and supported her through her doctorate. I have given her duties and assignments to challenge her. We discuss leadership issues together. I know that I would not be where I am today without the help of mentors. I was told to get out of my office, so I share this with others now.”

Nancy wanted to see females more confident in their ability. One of her biggest challenges was knowing that she could do the job of president. Her mentors really encouraged her and told her to trust herself. Sometimes this is a tough assignment when people still focus on the male/female issue. She stated,

I think we are moving in the right direction, but we still have a ways to go. We’ve still had editorials in the newspaper about the president and her girls, referring to the fact that I have more women on my cabinet. Now if it was reversed, and there were more men with a male president, as was true for many years, we didn’t hear about the president and his boys.

Nancy's advice for female leaders is to use their training, experience, and knowledge to do the best job they know how. They should trust in their ability and take that next step.

Cathy's Story

Cathy was a community college president in her early 60s. She was the eldest of eight children. When she was a young child her biological father was killed in the line of duty. So her mother and her younger sister moved into an apartment above her maternal grandmother's home. This living arrangement lasted for a short time until Cathy's mother returned to work, bought a home, and had her mother come to live with them and take care of the children. Her mother worked as a bookkeeper until she remarried and had six more children.

Her stepfather used the GI bill for assistance with his bachelor's degree. Education of his children was a priority. Cathy's mother did not finish high school; she elaborated,

This was something we never really talked about. Her father left the family and she needed to help the family financially. She never wanted to talk about her lack of education. I think she felt bad about it. So our mother always made sure we all went to the best schools. I'm sure with the private tuition they paid for all of us kids, that was not always easy. But they made it work. That is what they wanted for us. They wanted us to have the best education."

The importance of education was embraced by all the children in the family. The family birth order was first four girls, then a boy, then a girl, and then two boys. Two of the boys did not finish their college degrees, but all of the others had. Cathy and one sister had earned doctoral degrees, and four of the siblings had earned master's degrees. The entire

family was focused on the importance of education. Cathy commented, “We could kick our brothers and we continue to tell them it is never too late to finish a degree.”

In high school there was never a doubt that Cathy would attend college. She added, Most of the girls didn’t really go away to college then. Most stayed right in the same town. The good thing in terms of my father’s death is that I was able to get Social Security through college. Even though it was not much money back then, this little bit really helped out. It allowed me to be able to go.

Cathy began taking classes in the summer immediately following graduation. She also began working in a department store to help pay the bills. Her bachelor’s degree is in modern languages. Her plan was to become an interpreter in the United Nations. When she got closer to graduation, she had second thoughts about moving so far away from her home and family. She added,

So I started taking education requirements because I thought I could always teach. I was so lucky because I hadn’t planned on student teaching, and someone had just dropped out of student teaching in French. So, I got a spot right away.

After student teaching, Cathy received a teach corp grant the following summer and taught in an elementary school for several years. One of the requirements for this program was to earn a master’s degree, which Cathy did using the money available through the grant. In terms of finance, Cathy also received assistance for her doctoral program through a fellowship program with Title VII as a multicultural bilingual student. She considered herself very fortunate to have had so much financial assistance with her education.

Once she had taught for several years and completed her master’s degree, she met and married her husband. They moved across the country for him to complete his doctoral

program, and she began hers. For both her master's and doctoral programs Cathy was part of a cohort group. She noted,

This really helped facilitate my success. We studied together in a group and helped each other through all of it. The cohort model made it an easy way of doing it all. I can't believe I'm saying that, but it really helped so much to have a cohort group to rely on.

During her doctoral program Cathy also worked as a faculty member at a state college. She took some time off work in order to complete her coursework. When she was ready to return to work, a close friend made a connection for her to work in a private business closely related to education, but this was not a good fit for Cathy. Then she and her husband made a connection at a community college that needed assistance with grant writing. They both enjoyed this work, which kept them closely tied to the community college scene. After two years in this position, a dean's position opened up in that community college and Cathy received a job offer for this. For approximately five years she remained in the position of dean of arts and humanities. She then requested to be moved into the dean of business and industry position. She did this because she wanted to expand her knowledge base in preparation for becoming a community college president. After three years in this position she again decided she needed to expand her knowledge base and began searching for a vice president position. She remembered,

I was not having any luck in my area. I was told that sometimes you need to move in order to get ahead. So I expanded my search and was selected for a job out of state.

Unfortunately the job was not at a community college. I felt like a turncoat, but it

was a 4-year school with a technical ed component. So I felt like I was still connected to the community college mission.

Cathy truly missed the community culture and, after several years, was able to secure a vice president position at a community college. When she reached the point of applying for a position of president, she found an institution with a rich history of female presidents. She said,

I am the third president of this institution, and all have been females. The first president was here for about 10 years, and she had been a part of the public school technical ed system. The second president served for a short time, and then I am the third. I really think this is interesting. Most people think of the world of technical ed and think of the rough and tumble guys, but us females are doing a super job I think. The school did have two interim presidents who were male. I think we have a culture here that everyone is fine with females leading the college. I think a guy would be fine too, but I love this situation because it doesn't happen in too many places!

Cathy was also very fortunate when she assumed the role of president that the number of females in this role at this time was quite high. She was welcomed and supported by these females. She noted,

The females who were in the position of president at the time were strong women. And that was great. While they were strong, they were also very sensitive and made sure I was included. They all helped me with some of the peculiarities of our state system. Unfortunately we've lost several of these women, and their [successors] have been males. I'm so glad that was not the case when I came in.

Even so, the majority of the presidents were still men, and Cathy made a point to develop working relationships with them also. She vividly remembered how the men would all sit at tables together, and be a bit “clique-ish”:

I don’t know if they really meant it to be that way, but that is what they did. So I would just walk over and sit at one of their tables. I made myself become a part of their group also. I think that was important for me and for them too.

While reflecting on her preparation for the position of president, Cathy said that one opportunity that really helped her was a Ford Foundation grant that she heard about through the Hispanic Council:

“I was very enthusiastic about this. I got the exposure of the different elements of administration all the way up to the presidency. Different presidents were brought in to cover different topics with us. I was in the first cohort of future Latino leaders. This was a tremendous experience. And it had a great impact on me in terms of, by the time I completed the program, I knew I wanted to be a community college president. And I knew that I needed to move up each step of the way and keep contact with the networks I had established.

Once she had been exposed to the elements and skills she needed for a presidency, Cathy set about practicing them. She did this by strategically seeking out positions with a wide variety of duties. She described,

No one told me what I needed to learn and where to learn it. I just continually sought out opportunities for learning new skills. I continued to attend leadership conferences and surround myself with other great leaders in the community college system.

Cathy's leadership style was participatory. She had put together a great team, and each member provided input and unique perspectives on decision making. She explained,

I think over the years I have learned to throw my net much wider on the folks I interact with and I am able to get more perspectives. This allows for more buy in by people. It doesn't mean you will agree all the time, but that you have that dialogue and interaction. I know I've gotten much more collaborative and participative. I've included more and more people in the process. I really want their feedback and differing viewpoints. I keep opening up more and more over time.

One of the challenges of the first year in her presidency was dealing with a vice president who had been in that position for quite a while. As Cathy said,

I think there was a bit of a dance going on between she and I in terms of how we were going to work together. I came in with an understanding that the mission was a technical education mission. I didn't want to exclude strategies that would help our students succeed. My philosophy has been that we need to bring out how we offer our programs and services. That first year I got a lot of responses about we are a technical college so we don't do that. I really didn't care. If we need a writing center, we need a writing center even if we are a technical college. Everyone needs to write. I decided we would have a writing center and a math center. Those are the two most important skills our students will need in the world of work.

An additional challenge for Cathy was balancing her time between multiple campuses. As she was also called off campus for training and learning opportunities about the state system, she needed to be very strategic in where the remainder of her time was spent. She commented, "The two campuses would get very jealous of each other if I spent

more time at one location than the other. I learned to be very focused and deliberate in these efforts.”

Cathy considered her first year as president one filled with successes. One success of which she was particularly proud was the number of grants the institution was able to secure. When she came to this institution she noticed some of the gaps in the educational process that left students unable to succeed. So she put together a team of individuals who were very deliberate in applying for grants that would truly benefit them. When they received their first grant, they decided to keep on applying and had seen multiple successes. Cathy was able to bring much background knowledge to this process with her experiences from prior positions, saying,

I had maintained good relationships with many of my contacts in the grant writing.

Those connections and networks served me well and that also helped to establish me more firmly as a leader who really knew how to help my team succeed in the grant-writing process.

The rebuilding of relationships with area high schools was another success in Cathy’s first year as president. The numbers of students who were making the transition from high school to the community college was continually decreasing. She explained,

Our connections had really gone downhill. And I wanted us to have these connections with these partners. We started by putting some of our counselors in the high schools through some of the grant money we have received. This really helped establish that important rapport with the superintendents, counselors, and students.

I’m thrilled because it has turned around that program.”

The positive impact for the college is the celebration that Cathy saw from her successes. That in itself was the celebration for her. She added, “As long as the president has the focus that everything must be done to benefit the student, you can’t go wrong. We are supporting services that students need to succeed, and that is a celebration every day.”

Personally, Cathy celebrated her success by keeping an active network of personal friends. She made it a point to share her good times and bad times with them. She traveled to see them and also used technology to stay in touch. Her family also was very important to her. She felt especially fortunate now because both her children were living close by.

Entering the presidency is not always an easy road for females, Cathy noted. On several occasions when she needed to move in order to secure a position to further her career, her family stayed behind. She commented,

My husband and I have had to live apart on several occasions. The first years were usually all right with the crazy hours and large workload, but after a couple of years, we decided we really needed to be back together.”

Cathy spoke highly of her mentors. The mentors with whom she had worked had been females. The group just seemed to naturally fall together. She said,

A couple of us began doing training together, and so we naturally supported and helped each other. We had so much fun other people wanted to join us. It is a special bond that has grown over time. I did attempt to develop a mentoring relationship with a male, but that really didn’t work out. I don’t think he knew how to be a mentor. So I decided to stick with my group of females.

This particular group of women also offered Cathy opportunities for friendship outside of her institution.

The need for mentors while moving forward in a career is something Cathy stressed. She said that females should not wait for mentors to find them; they need to go out and find someone who can lead them forward:

I think every female needs a mentor. We need to learn from each other. We need to learn from the mistakes and challenging experiences we face and what happens in our careers as we move on. Why reinvent the wheel, why make the same mistakes again and again? At least if we learn from each other, it plants the seeds for us to move forward.

Helen's Story

Helen was a community college president in her mid-50s. She was the oldest child in her family. She had two younger brothers. She grew up in a stable family setting. Neither of her parents had a college education. Education was not a high priority in the family. She noted, "My parents talked about us going to college, but they didn't push any of us in that direction."

Helen's brothers were both quite a bit younger than she was, and so they were closer to each other than to her. She observed, "I was older and I took care of them after school. I was the daughter, and they were my kid brothers. What they chose to do with their lives was not really aligned with the decisions I made for myself." Her parents knew education was different for her brothers. She explained,

My brothers were, for the most part, interested in technical things, while I was a serious, straight A student. They were typical boys. If they had a sick day, they were OK with that. I really loved school and didn't ever want to miss a day. I really wanted to learn, so my brothers and I were very different in that aspect.

Helen said her parents probably assumed she would go on to college because of her love of school. What her parents did caution her about was getting married too soon. She stated,

They wanted to make sure that marriage was not the only option for me. They did want me to chart my own course in life. This was at a time with the women's movement going on, so my mother was interested in making sure that her daughter had opportunities she did not have.

Although her parents didn't push a college education on her, Helen said her parents were very supportive of her choice to attend college. When she was a middle school student, she was in the college-bound group. As a high school student, Helen said she was a book worm. She would rather spend her days reading than do anything else. She explained,

In my high school we had the typical foreign language courses of French and Spanish, but I wanted to learn Russian. So, I got a book and taught myself by reading the grammar so I could understand how it worked. I guess I was a bit different than your traditional student at that time.

The decision to attend college was really made for her by her high school. Helen said she was tracked immediately into the college-bound group of students. She was a good student, and her parents never worried about her grades and attendance. However, once she graduated from high school, she chose to work. Her fiancé went off to college. Helen really didn't know what she wanted to do with her life at this point, and she knew her parents didn't have the money to pay her way. She knew she couldn't afford to pay for it all herself either. So work was the option she chose. She added,

This was my way of taking some time to think about where I was going in life. We got engaged, and he went off to college. I needed to figure out what I wanted to do with my life and where I wanted to be.

After several years, Helen did begin college. The plan was for her to finish college and then get married. Her fiancé graduated and was offered an excellent job quite a distance away from their hometown. So, the couple decided to move up the wedding plans so they could move together. This meant that Helen was not able to complete her college degree. At this point, Helen said, “I just let college go.” Once her husband began working, she decided after several months that she too would get a job. So she worked and then had a child. She made the choice to stay home with her child for several years. Then the idea of a college degree returned. This time she had a plan in mind. She decided to get a degree in business because that should be useful for future employment. She made choices for classes and colleges centered around her childcare, as she did not want her child to be in daycare for long periods of time. She continued,

By the time my son was in kindergarten, I could get him to school and still do most of my classes during the day. And then I could be back at his school in time to pick him up from kindergarten. So, that is kind of how I organized my life so that I could be a mom and go to school.

Helen had assistance from many of her college instructors. When she was at a 2-year college, instructors told her not to quit, but to move on to a 4-year college and get a bachelor’s degree. When she began her bachelor’s program, an instructor began talking to her about getting her CPA. But conversations also centered around what Helen really wanted to do with her education. She stated,

When this instructor began talking to me about this, it really surprised me because I thought I had it all planned out. She asked what I really wanted to be and I told her if I could choose anything I would be an anthropologist. So I ended up switching my major to follow my passion.

Helen completed her bachelor's degree and went right on into a master's program at a large university. With encouragement from faculty members again, Helen moved immediately into a Ph.D. program. Her program involved much time abroad and conducting research. When she returned to the United States to write her dissertation, she received a call from a community college asking if she would be interested in teaching a class, because the instructor who had been assigned to teach had not showed up. Helen and a fellow student decided they could do this together. Helen's relationship with community colleges grew steadily from this one class. She began teaching some online classes in her field and eventually began building and teaching multiple courses each term at the community college. She noted,

In my family I was a first-generation college student, and I really enjoyed the nontraditional college students at the community college. It was just a great experience. It was very different than teaching at a large university. These students were for the most part traditional-age students. But at the community college, these were working students. They needed to get their degree and work. They were oftentimes coming in after work to take classes. It was just a different kind of student.

For this very reason Helen loved teaching at the community college. She didn't want to teach the students that mom and dad were forcing into an education when she could work

with those students who truly wanted to learn. When a full-time faculty position opened up at the community college, Helen jumped at the chance, much to the dismay of her Ph.D. colleagues. She had entertained ideas of a post-doctoral position at the university; however, she decided this was not the route for her.

After teaching for five years, Helen was promoted to a dean's position in the humanities. Her career goal at this point was to become an administrator in order to do the kinds of things that would help faculty and students be more successful. This went well, and Helen was given a position of executive dean position when retirements occurred. Her duties were greatly expanded, and she took advantage of a variety of professional development opportunities. Helen said these training opportunities were wonderful learning opportunities for her. She gained knowledge of curriculum, accreditation, program development, and faculty and staff development, among other topics.

Helen understood the importance of networking and making connections in one's field. She had people encourage her to apply for a position that came open at another community college. She was able to discuss it with her supervisors, and they encouraged her to take advantage of growth opportunities. She described,

In our discussions, my supervisor knew this would be a good career move for me. He knew our institution would not have any openings for a while, and this position would be a good fit for me. He told me I should want to move up and, if I wanted to eventually become a president, I needed to find these opportunities and take advantage of them. And so I did apply for the position and got the job.

Helen worked as a vice president for four years when an interim president position came open. She was recommended to the board for this position and was given a 6-month trial. She continued,

At the end of the 6-month trial, we did a community-wide evaluation of me.

Everybody in the community could evaluate me. There were forms community members could write comments on, and board members called key people in the community. They were able to get input. I also went through a formal interview and was offered the job as president.

In addition to the training Helen had throughout all of her various positions in her career advancement, she participated in leadership development programs. But she believed the best training was job experience in a wide variety of areas.

Helen was the second female president at her institution. She noted,

I think with some of the senior board members who hired the first female, this probably did make the decision to hire me easier for them. They had already seen a woman in this position as president of the college, and that was good. For others in the community, I think what they wanted was someone who cared about the college. And I think that is what they saw in me as an interim. They knew that I had made hard decisions when I was an interim. They were not always happy with my decisions, but they knew that I was committed and wanted to stay.

The standards for a female president are not always the same as those for a male
Helen admitted:

I'm sure the previous president never had people comment on how he looked. And that happens all the time for me. People will say I look great or they love my

hairstyle. Maybe they comment on my jewelry or my outfit. I doubt they would do that for a male. I have studied gender dynamics and know that there are differences in how males and females are perceived in their roles. I know that there are gender expectations. I don't think male presidents would be expected to be concerned or empathetic. And there will be some people who say this is not a factor. But I would differ; when you start peeling back the layers of the onion, you'll see that there are gender expectations buried there.

With her past experiences, including those prior to her years in the field of education, Helen knew the challenges. She said, "A male can be assertive and that is accepted, but a female could be viewed as a bitch if she is too strong." She was pleased to see that more females are entering male-dominated boards and organizations. "But," she added,

we still expect women to act like women. And that is a challenge for me because I have worked for so many years in male-dominated fields. I find myself having to pay attention to those softer things because they are really not on my radar any more.

You know if I walk into a room, for the most part, I've never walked into a room where a man is in charge and asked if anyone needed a drink or a cookie, where many women will naturally do that. I forget about that, probably because that is my personality . . . and that is challenging for me because the expectation is that I will do those types of things simply because I am a woman.

Helen described her leadership style as servant leadership with qualities of transformational leadership. What she really believed in doing is hiring good people and enabling them to do their job well. Her style was to focus on helping people grow into the best possible person. She elaborated,

When I became a vice president, I learned very quickly that people didn't understand my style. They expected me to come in and be more assertive. Rather than go around and ask people how things are going, they wanted me to make changes and move things forward. And so, fast forward to the presidency . . . I tried to keep things moving forward as interim, but you are really holding the position for the next person. When I became president, I told everyone we needed to get going because we had lost some time. The previous president had a very participatory form of leadership, and that had created a lot of angst. People didn't like it. I knew the college had to move forward, and that is what we did.

The hurdles Helen encountered during her first year in the presidency related back to the angst she referred to earlier. Some people in the communities served by the community college just were not happy. The hurdle was to get these people to move on and become supportive of the college. Helen listened to a lot of feedback and comments. She tried to figure out different ways to view situations and gather opinions from as many people as possible. She acknowledged that the challenge was to hear as many voices as possible and include them in the conversations. She was working on reorganizing her cabinet to include more people and have every cabinet person gather information and bring it back for discussion.

Success to Helen meant many different things. Obvious success was that the college continued to focus on meeting the needs of the students. Relating to the board of trustee members was another success for Helen. She wanted to develop those solid working relationships in order to move forward. Then she focused on regional and national exposure and making sure the mission and vision of the institution were being carried out. She said,

I was able to demonstrate to the board that the college was moving in the right direction, things were progressing according to their goals and according to the vision we had worked to establish and develop in our strategic plan. I tend not to mark things and say this is a success. We just keep moving. Just keep moving forward. That is success.

Helen was fortunate in that she did not seek out her mentors, but rather they appeared when she needed them, noting,

When I was a faculty member, I had a vice president stop me in the hallway. I didn't think she even knew who I was. And she asked if I had applied for the dean's position. This came out of the blue when she volunteered to do some mock interviews with me and help me prepare . . . I learned that she had been watching me and identified me as someone with potential to become a good administrator. And from that point forward she was a great mentor for me.

Because this mentor was so important to Helen and her career development, she had made a point of doing the same thing for other females, saying, "I've approached lots of women and asked how I can help them. I ask them where they want to be and what role can I take to help them get there."

Helen's advice for females advancing in administrative roles is to be open to all ideas and take advantage of every opportunity:

Don't lock yourself into a specific career path so much that you are not open to other opportunities that come your way. People came up to me and presented opportunities I had never even thought of. When an opportunity presents itself, take advantage of it. I can't imagine not doing that; that would be awful. I think I've never had one of

those out-of-the-blue opportunities that was a bad choice. Because no matter what it is, you're going to come away with something. It may be that you realize this is not for you, that you don't want to do that. But it is still a tool, a learning tool, you still have received experiences you otherwise wouldn't have gotten.

CHAPTER 5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Each of the five participants shared her own personal stories leading up to her role as president and experiences of the first year in that position. The narratives are all unique and impressive in their own way. The purpose of this study was to explore and understand how these individuals arrived at the presidency and how they reflected on their first year in this position.

Summary

The study was framed around the following research questions:

1. How do female community college presidents describe their pathways to a presidency position?
2. How do female community college presidents view prior training, mentoring, and educational opportunities that led to successful experiences during the first year as a community college president?
3. How do female community college presidents view their experiences during their first year in that position?
4. How do female community college presidents explain any voids or deficiencies in their career pathway that made achieving success during their first year more challenging?

Themes

During the coding process, multiple themes were developed for each research question, as shown below.

Research question 1: How do female community college presidents describe their pathway to a presidency position?

- Parental and family support,
- Importance of education, and
- Being strategic with work and life decisions.

Research question 2: How do female community college presidents view prior training, mentoring, and educational opportunities that led to successful experiences during the first year as a community college president?

- Taking advantage of training opportunities,
- Developing a professional network,
- Enriching life choices with mentoring opportunities, and
- Being a continuous learner.

Research question 3: How do female community college presidents view their experiences during their first year in that position?

- Knowing and understanding oneself,
- Being a mentor to others,
- Being held to different standards than male counterparts,
- Challenges in the first year,
- Making choices based on family situations,
- Finding a balance between professional and personal life,
- Defining success, and
- Advice to women advancing in their career pathways

Research question 4: How do female community college presidents explain any voids or deficiencies in their career pathway that made achieving success during their first year more challenging?

- Lack of fundraising knowledge.

Each of these themes will be explained in this chapter within the context of the research questions framing this study.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 was: How do female community college presidents describe their pathways to a presidency position?

Parental and family support. Each of the participants expressed the importance of parental support in early life and family support later in life to reach their accomplishments. Some of them said that higher education was an expectation, whereas others stated that “their parents supported them in whatever life path they chose.” For example, when Sarah chose to get married at age 18 soon after being the high school valedictorian, her parents supported her. She said that her parents thought her choice of marriage was “great.” Later in life, when she chose to return to pursue a college education, her family wholeheartedly supported her choice. Sarah said,

When my father passed away, I realized that people didn’t live forever. I had thought about going back to school for quite a while and decided I shouldn’t wait any longer.

I knew that a college education would open doors for me.

Once she made the decision to return to college, her mother and her husband supported her totally. Her mother was a widow and loved watching her children during the day. In addition, her children also spent many hours on the tractor with their father while she went to

school. Sarah readily admitted that she would not have been successful without the support of both her husband and her mother.

Mary's family did not force education upon her; she expected it of herself. Mary said that most of her classmates in high school made plans of marriage and having a family. She had different dreams for herself, explaining,

For as long as I can remember, all of my friends ever wanted was to get married and have a family. And all I ever wanted to do was go to school. So, I was very lucky that I had a progressive father who supported me in anything that I did.

Mary was fortunate that her family held this attitude of support for her, as she described, "I had uncles who would say to my father, why are you sending your daughter to school? She will just end up married anyway. You should save your money for your son."

For Nancy, college was not an option—it was an expectation of her parents; and they supported her totally in this phase of life. She noted, "There was never any question about my brother and I attending college. My parents decided that we would both continue on in school, and that was it. Never any questions about it."

Education was held in high esteem in Cathy's family. Her stepfather had completed his bachelor's degree with assistance from the GI bill; however, her mother did not finish high school. Cathy explained about her mother,

This was something we never really talked about. Her father left the family and she needed to help the family financially. She never wanted to talk about her lack of education. I think she felt bad about it. So our mother always made sure we all went to the best schools. I'm sure with the private tuition they paid for all of us kids, that

was not easy. But they made it work. That is what they wanted for us. They wanted us to have the best education.

Helen's family viewed education differently for her than for her brothers. She possessed a great love for education and described herself as a serious student:

My parents probably assumed I would go on to college because of my love of school.

They wanted to make sure that marriage was not the only option for me. They did want me to chart my own course in life. This was at a time with the women's movement going on, so my mother was interested in making sure that her daughter had opportunities she did not have.

Importance of education. All of the participants in this study realized that education would open doors for them. They knew that whatever career they chose, higher education would be necessary. According to Duree's (2007) study, an earned doctorate is the highest degree for the majority of leadership positions in the field of education. Although the participants of this study did not identify the goal of becoming a community college president, they knew education would be needed along their career pathways.

Not one of the participants completed her educational pathway without numerous stops and starts. Due to life demands of careers and motherhood, education was not completed as a full-time option. However, many of their life stories were enriched by the stop outs in their formal education process.

As Nancy worked in a business setting after her bachelor's degree, she decided that this was not a good fit for her life. She said, "I worked for almost two years. And I was just not enjoying what I was doing. There was a side of business I did not like." As a result of

this experience, Nancy was able to determine that a career in education was more commensurate with her interests and abilities. She described,

I decided to go back to school and finish off my teaching credentials. My advisor said to me, you know, you need to go back to a community college and finish that. She said to go to a community college where the tuition would be much lower and I could receive the education I needed. Frankly, at that point in my life, I had no idea of what a community college was. And I just fell in love with community colleges, and got the education I needed to do what I wanted to do.

Sarah realized after her father's death that she wanted to be able to provide for her family through a professional career; consequently, she made the decision to begin her bachelor's degree program. She noted,

Obviously I liked school. So I decided to go back to school. There was no on-line option, no cohort-type program, only traditional style. So I commuted back and forth every day. I struggled, but I knew that a college education would open doors for me the rest of my life.

Although Mary knew she wanted to be a teacher from her elementary school experience, it was after teaching for several years at a high school and returning to work on her master's degree that she made her connection to the community college system. Mary acknowledged that education opened doors for her career pathway: "While I was working on my master's degree, I began teaching as an adjunct at a community college. That was a great opportunity for me, and it developed because of my growth through education."

Helen made the decision to delay her start in college because she really didn't know what she wanted to do, not because she didn't value education. When she did begin her

college years, she was able to focus her efforts and truly benefit from her education. She said, “Three years after our child was born, I decided to go back to school. Since I had worked in a business office before, I thought what I probably should do was go ahead and get my CPA.” Helen began her classes at a technical school because they offered the classes she needed in the morning and she could be at home with her child the remainder of the day. After several years at the technical school, her child was in kindergarten. At this time she began her bachelor’s degree:

By this time my child was in kindergarten and I could get him to school and still do most of my classes during the day and then be in time to pick him up from school. That is how I organized my life so that I could be a mom and go to school. . . . I ended up changing my major. I did a 180 and wound up going in an entirely different direction. But I told my friends that I needed to follow my passion. I decided that I really wanted to teach. I knew my education would be valuable to me in this profession.”

Being strategic with work and life decisions. Putting oneself in the company of the “right” people and volunteering for new learning opportunities through employment or conferences is a topic all participants addressed. Mary found that increasing job responsibilities was a significant way to enhance skills in educational administration. She admitted that she had to work “really hard” as she added duties to her already demanding schedule. However, this demonstrated to her what the role of a president involved. She said,

I served as the vice president for academic affairs for about 15 years. When the vice president of student services retired, I took on those responsibilities also. I just kept

adding to my plate. I added a wide variety of experiences to my professional life this way.

Cathy was very strategic in obtaining positions that gave her experience in gaining the skills she needed to become a president. She had to relocate to find them. She was not selected for a position at her college, as she explained, “I was not having any luck in my area, and I was told that sometimes you need to move in order to get ahead. So I expanded my search and was selected for a job out of state.” Her choices came with adjustments—she had to live apart from her family for several years in two situations. But with support from her family, she was able to make each opportunity work out to her benefit. She noted,

My husband and I have had to live apart on several occasions. The first years were usually all right with the crazy hours and large workload, but after a couple of years, we decided we really needed to be back together.

Career choices women leaders need to make do impact family situations.

According to the 2012 AACC report (Tekle, 2012), marital status and child-rearing responsibilities between women and men are different. In 2011, 90 percent of male presidents were married, compared to 72 percent of female presidents. In 2006, 63 percent of female were married. Therefore, the number of married female presidents has increased, just as the number of female presidents has increased. However the proportion of married female presidents lags behind that of male presidents (Tekle, 2012).

Family status is another area of difference between women and men. A total of 72 percent of women presidents have children, as compared to 90 percent of male presidents (AACC, 2012). Women presidents also were more likely to have changed or altered their career path in order to raise children or care for their spouse. Additionally, 10 percent of

women presidents had left the job market or reduced their workload to part time to accommodate family responsibilities, compared with three percent of men presidents (Tekle, 2012).

Cathy knew the skills necessary for becoming a college president, and she strategically set out to practice them. She remembered,

No one told me what I needed to learn and where to learn it. I just continually sought out opportunities for learning new skills. I continued to attend leadership conferences and surround myself with other great leaders in the community college system.

Nancy knew that she would need her doctoral degree in order to advance to the employment level she envisioned. That was her motivation to complete her terminal degree. She commented,

I was working full-time, had young children and decided to go back to school. That was a great plan. The program was in a cohort format and it was amazing! I knew that if I wanted to move on, that I would need this degree. So in a way this was a strategic choice. I had a colleague with a young child also, and we sat down together and decided to do this together. In the cohort we were all very busy, and we all had kids. The women were actually the first ones to finish the program.

Nancy also was very strategic in considering what her presidency might look like. She considered rural versus urban campuses and decided what the best fit was for her personally:

Some of the trainings I attended included discussions about working in a small school or a large school and how we needed to understand the differences. I wanted to be in a small school, and they warned me about being in a small school in a small community. They said you would be one of the key leaders in the community. And

that is so true! But it is also very tiring. Because every time you go to the grocery store, and if you show up in your sweats with no makeup on, they still know you.

And the college is always in the newspaper.

According to Nancy, one of her best strategies for learning new skills was to volunteer for projects just getting started, including ones she knew very little about. She explained,

My strategy was to look for opportunities at the institution I was at. I would volunteer. I would say that I might not know a lot about this project, but I'll work on it and learn about it. I tell people to think about how you can contribute a little bit to an area that is very foreign to you. Educationally, I always took the opportunity to craft projects around things I didn't know a whole lot about or activities I was not familiar with. This strategy helped me to fill in the gaps.

Accepting that learning a new skill doesn't mean you have to perform in that capacity the rest of your career was a concept that kept Sarah on the path of learning. She decided that when a door opened, she would walk through it without worry because she could always change her mind and change her direction. She commented,

When a door opens, walk through it—I'd say that to anybody. If I hadn't finally decided I could be a president, then I wouldn't be here. I had to finally ask myself if I wanted to do this or not. What would happen if I did do it and didn't like it? Well gosh, then I can change. It's not a lifetime commitment. I just keep on learning.

Helen defined strategic as always looking for that new opportunity to try something different and learn from it:

When an opportunity presents itself, take advantage of it. I can't imagine not; that would be awful. I never met an opportunity I didn't like. If there is an opportunity

that comes your way to learn something, to do something, to accept a challenge—take it! Take it. I think I’ve never had one of those out of the blue opportunities that was a bad choice. No matter what it is, you’re going to come away with something. It may be that you realize this is not for you or that you don’t want to do that. But you still got information you wouldn’t have gotten without taking advantage of the opportunity.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 was: How do female community college presidents view prior training, mentoring, and educational opportunities that led to successful experiences during the first year as a community college president?

Take advantage of training opportunities. Although all the participants in this study voiced the opinion that formal education holds great importance, they also acknowledged the value in professional training opportunities. Duree (2007) found that 57 percent of the presidents in his study had participated in leadership development programs outside of formal education both prior to assuming a presidency and after accepting that position.

This finding would suggest that whether presidents afford themselves the opportunity to participate in leadership programs before or after they begin the job, these programs address an obvious need for training beyond the scope of what is made available through formalized education programs and background experiences.

(Duree, 2007, p. 113)

After Sarah had completed her master’s degree, she took advantage of training opportunities available to her through her employer. When a leadership development

program opportunity was made available to her, she readily accepted it. She noted, “Once again this was an opportunity that presented itself, and so I went and continued my learning.” Mary also participated in multiple leadership development opportunities. Her direct supervisor realized the importance of current skills. She explained, “My former boss made sure I was very up-to-date on everything. He was a great mentor. He made sure I got the experiences I needed to develop professionally. He gave me skills in this area.” Although Mary’s supervisor allowed her these opportunities to attend leadership academies, conferences, and seminars, she also took a lead role in her development. She said that she continually sought out conferences and seminars she viewed as most beneficial to her own development.

Not only did Nancy participate in leadership development programs such as the League for Innovation Executive Leadership Institute, she also joined the National Council of Student Development. She participated in this organization in a variety of different roles. She commented,

This was an incredible experience for me, not just being a student in it, but also being a faculty in it. This was a big part of my training. You don’t always have to be a student. Remember that if you teach, you have to know a whole lot about the subject.

So that was a very helpful experience for me.

Helen also participated in professional trainings in several different areas. In addition to leadership trainings, she also took advantage of trainings available to her through faculty and academic positions. While serving as an executive dean in the humanities, she gained valuable knowledge in the areas of curriculum, accreditation, program development, faculty

and staff development. She considered the professional growth related to these topics as a valuable component of her career growth.

Enriching life choices with mentoring opportunities. Mentoring proved to be invaluable for the participants of this study. Research findings support the importance of mentoring (Duree, 2007; Eddy, 2005; V. Green, 2008; McDade, 2005; Stubbe, 2008). Each of the participants had at least one important mentor, and several had multiple mentors from which they learned different lessons. They all agreed that if mentors don't find you, you must go and seek them out. Sarah said that she had some mentors who she didn't know at the time were mentoring her. But upon reflection, she realized how important these mentors were to her professional development. She said,

Some I didn't realize were mentors at the time, not until later. Like my high school business teacher. I would never have considered him as a mentor, but when I went back for my student teaching I realized how important he had been. I would definitely consider him a mentor.

Her mentors were able to guide her in life choices and offer feedback when she was unsure of how to proceed. She noted,

I've had people in my life tell me that I can do whatever I want to do. It wasn't that I should be a nurse or a teacher. They helped me decide what I wanted to do and then encouraged me to achieve it.

Mary realized the importance of having different perspectives from a variety of mentors. Early mentors for Mary were her parents and grandparents. Her father supported her in everything she did and wanted to do. Her mother and grandmother were both strong women who mentored her in her early years. She remembered,

I was brought up to understand that I could do anything. I was a sickly child and when you sit on the couch and watch the world just go by, you get frustrated because you want to be out there in the world. So I'm thankful to be alive and to have meaningful work.

Currently Mary had mentors in the community she could rely on for support and advice. She explained,

I have people in the community I can go to for advice. I can also look to my boss right now. Our temperaments and way of doing things differently seem to match. He offers a different perspective on many situations that can be useful to me when making decisions. I also have people that if I question myself I can go to and ask, "What do you think about this? How would you proceed? Is this normal? Am I crazy? This is what I'm thinking, what do you think?" I have quite a few people I can turn to when I have a question or concern.

Nancy readily admitted that she would not be where she was without the push from her mentors. Her stories included statements of her mentors telling her she needed to do more, work harder, and take advantage of her inner potential. She elaborated,

I'll never forget the day one of my mentors walked into my office. She said to me, "OK, this is the deal. You're wasting in here. We need you to do more things at this institution. You have great potential. Let's go to lunch and talk about this." So that was good motivation for me.

Nancy's mentors also taught her to trust in herself. And at the same time they helped her realize that she would never have all the answers, but that is why she needed a team to assist her in decision making. She explained,

I have another mentor who I have watched over the years. I had the ability to talk with her and listen to her in many different settings. Even when I moved out of the area, she would still check in with me. And if I had a need or a challenge, I could call her or drop her a note. She has been an inspiration to me and also a mentor and role model as far as her presidency and leadership style. We have discussed leadership styles and the importance of putting together a great team.

There were times when attempts at mentoring were not successful. Cathy was able to develop a working relationship with a man she considered to be a great leader in education. She described,

I was able to work on some projects with a person I consider a great leader. He was wonderful to work with and was a very interesting person. But when I worked with him, he didn't give me any feedback. I was so disappointed. That is why I wanted to work with him. I wanted to get his feedback.

However, even though that relationship was not successful, Cathy had developed relationships with other mentors throughout her career. A group of women had given her wonderful feedback along with friendship. She stated,

This group of women just naturally fell together. We met each other when we were doing training across the state together. We had so much in common, and we all wanted to do more. I think we all need to learn from each other. We need to learn from the mistakes and challenging experiences we face and what happens in our careers as we move forward.

Helen was fortunate that her mentors found her. She did not need to seek them out. Mentors appeared when she needed them the most. She described,

When I was a faculty member, I had a vice president stop me in the hallway. I didn't think she even knew who I was. And she asked if I had applied for the dean's position. This came out of the blue when she volunteered to do some mock interviews with me and help me prepare. . . . I learned that she had been watching me and identified me as someone with potential to become a good administrator. And from that point forward she was a great mentor for me.

Although others commented that they initiated their mentor relationships, Helen believed that this is a relationship that develops on its own, saying, "I don't think you can really choose your mentors. I don't think that is the way it works. I think you need to be ready and open for the opportunity and then make sure you take advantage of it."

Developing a professional network. According to all participants, maintaining a professional network was imperative. Each participant benefitted from friends and associates and the connections they offered. Mary was successful in building positive relationships with those with whom she worked in all positions. She said one never knows when one might need their assistance when moving throughout one's career. The support of members from her network was obvious when she applied for a presidency. She explained,

I got a call from the chancellor asking me if I would accept the position of president. He said I had a lot of supporters. When he asked for input from the community, faculty and staff, he said that everyone including my fellow colleagues were doing a stampede to get me the position. I said yes to the position.

According to Sarah, it's all about one's network. The people you develop a relationship with are the people who will recommend you for a job promotion. These are the

people who will remember you and let others know your abilities. She strongly emphasized that people remember you by your reputation:

I have always tried to be very fair, very matter-of-fact, and logical. People I associate with know this about me. Some of my past decisions were hard decisions to make, but the people around me knew how and why I made the decisions I did. And then people tend to think, “OK, I can see why that happened and she made that decision.” Then you can go on from there.

Helen knew firsthand the importance of her network. She had people recommend her for promotions multiple times. In fact, she switched departments more than once just to get more experience and expand her network of contacts. Helen even had people encourage her to apply for a position that came open at another community college. Because of her strong network, she was able to discuss this potential move with her supervisors, and they encouraged her to take advantage of this opportunity. She commented,

In our discussions, my supervisor knew this would be a good career move for me. He knew our institution would not have any openings for a while and this position would be a good fit for me. He told me I should want to move up and if I wanted to eventually become a president, I needed to find these opportunities and take advantage of them. And so I did apply for the position and got the job.

In order to expand her network, Cathy joined organizations that fit her personality and background. She knew that she wanted to work with great leaders in order to learn from them. As a result, she had developed an extensive network. She kept her network active with communication. She elaborated,

I think over the years I have learned to throw my net much wider on the folks I interact with and I am able to get more perspectives. This allows for more buy in by people. It doesn't mean you will agree all the time, but that you have the dialogue and interaction.

Networks that Cathy created in different positions helped her along her career pathway. She stated,

When I began working with grants again, I knew that my past grant-writing experiences could help me out. So I called my contacts and requested copies of some of the grants we had worked on together. Those connections and networks served me well. That helped to establish me more firmly as a leader who really knew how to help my team success in current grant writing projects.

Be a continuous learner. The love of learning is a phrase that was used countless times throughout the interviews with participants. Duree (2007) noted that an earned doctorate is the highest degree for the majority of leadership positions. He reported that 87 percent of the respondents had either a Ph.D. or an Ed.D. (p. 111). In addition to formal education, additional learning opportunities also hold great value for community college presidents. Eddy (2008) and M. Green (1997) found that women often avoided or postponed training for and assuming leadership roles due to demands of family responsibilities. They noted one way to encourage women's participation in leadership training and thus forward progression in the leadership pipeline is through "grow your own" programs such as LINC. According to Ebbers et al. (2000), LINC was created through coordinated efforts of Iowa State University, the Iowa Community College Trustees Association, and the Iowa

Community College Presidents. Opportunities such as these are ones that all five participants used to their advantage.

Cathy repeatedly shared that she loved learning. This love of learning motivated her all the way through her Ph.D. and throughout countless other learning opportunities. She continued to take classes and never passed up an opportunity to learn.

Helen said that she couldn't remember a time when she didn't love learning. Even in elementary school she was the student who always went above and beyond. She hated to miss any school days at all. And this is a love she was still embracing. After completing her Ph.D., Helen continued to learn through professional development opportunities. She talked about curriculum, accreditation, program development, and faculty and staff development among other topics, saying, "These are pockets of knowledge that you need to add to your formal education. This is what helped make me successful in so many of my various positions."

Learning was how Sarah continued to challenge herself. She made the decision to continue earning additional degrees even when she was not sure if she would need them in the future. She commented, "I love learning. I love taking classes. I love teaching other people. Although I didn't need this [master's] degree, at this point, I thought it was good for me to stretch myself and be ready for that next challenge." Sarah also took the love of learning beyond herself. Not only did she love to learn, but she also loved to share that love of learning with others. She had stayed in the field of education so that she was able to share this love of learning and motivate others to love learning. She believed this so strongly she said, "If you are not a lifelong learner, you don't belong in education. We are here to help develop people."

Nancy shared how she loved school from the moment she started as a child, and that love of learning had continued all her life. After Nancy completed her Ph.D. program, her love of learning led her to other avenues for growth. The trainings and conferences she attended helped her realize that as a president she would be able to motivate others to learn. She commented,

I thought about how I enjoy new challenges, and I'll get an itch for new and different responsibilities. I realized that I could pull on my experiences from many years in the community college system, and I would have the ability to make a difference to guide an institution forward.

In addition to formal education, which she believed provided her with a great wealth of knowledge, Mary also emphasized the importance of other learning through conferences, seminars, and academies. She noted,

My former boss made sure I was very up-to-date on everything. . . . He made sure I got the experiences I needed to develop professionally. He gave me skills in this area. I also think that being a chief academic officer for so many years was probably the best training I had.

Mary also stressed that life experiences are the foundation of what individuals learn:

You also need to remember all of the skills we learn in kindergarten about treating others fairly and how you would like to be treated. So, when I got this [presidency position] in my early 60s, I had an entire career, experiences, and education that shaped who I was and prepared me well for this position.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 was: How do female community college presidents view their experiences during their first year in that position?

Knowing and understanding oneself. According to the participants of this study, being comfortable with oneself as an individual is part of the key to success. Mary shared stories of herself as a sickly child. She would sit on the couch and watch the world go by. Today she is so thankful to have meaningful work and to interact with wonderful people. Because of her childhood experiences, she believed that she was in a servant leadership position. Moreover, she believed if someone is not comfortable with that concept, that individual probably is not going to be successful in a president's position, stating, "There is no room for ego in this job. It's a servant leadership position. And if you're not comfortable with that you're probably not going to make it." She had come to realize, and accept, that she was not perfect and would make mistakes. Because Mary described herself as an innovator, she didn't always fit into the norm at work, giving this example,: "When I first arrived on the job, I was the first one to get a computer. I didn't know what to do without a computer, and most of my colleagues didn't know what to do with one."

Nancy explained that part of her personality leads her to take care of issues before they become critical. Her predecessor would yell and scream in a problem situation, but she preferred to have frequent check-ins. Nancy used the analogy of pots on the stove: "I don't like pots boiling and boiling until they boil over." If something concerned her, she let people know and then they could talk about it. Nancy's core belief was empowerment. She believed in having a strong team, supporting the team members, and helping them develop.

Sarah knew that her personality tended to make her overprepare. She shared one of her mother's lessons. Her mother always told her to be like a duck and let things roll off her back. Her mother also told her that people are all very different, and one might as well get used to it. With her mother's guidance, Sarah learned at an early age to be comfortable with who she was, as she explained, "I learned that you have to be comfortable in your own skin. What others think of you doesn't make the person." This was not an aspect of herself that came quickly. She had to make some conscious decisions to modify her actions. She admitted that she was a total introvert and people pleaser 20 years ago, and that "over time I have just grown into my skin." Sarah knew that she would need to make some modifications in order to be successful in her career. Although she knew she couldn't totally rework herself, she noted,

just because I'm a president doesn't mean I have to make major changes just for that sake. Being president means that I have a broader responsibility. Now that I'm comfortable with my personality, I am careful not to let the position change me too much.

Knowing that, through education, a person would serve the greater good is a factor that Helen embraced. She also believed that servant leadership was vital to her position. She was comfortable with her role as an educator because she realized that what she really wanted to do was serve others. Because of this philosophy, she didn't focus on what she did, but rather, she focused on what staff members did and how she would help them grow and become better at what they did. Knowing herself, Helen knew she needed to take advantage of all opportunities. This includes allowing herself the opportunity to entertain other people's ideas. Helen said she had never had an "out-of-the blue opportunity" that was a bad

choice. Even if an opportunity makes an individual realize that something is not a good fit for that individual, it still can be a learning opportunity.

Be a mentor to others. In addition to benefitting from having a mentor, being a mentor is also an important aspect in leadership development. Stubbe (2008) found in her study that 93.9 percent of female presidents took time during their years as president to mentor others. Duree (2007) also found that 85 percent of respondents were currently participating in formal or informal mentor-protégé relationships as a mentor.

Mentors were important to Nancy as she moved through her career, and she was making a point to be a mentor to others. She provided an example:

I have worked with a female and supported her through her doctorate. I have given her duties and assignments to challenge her. We discuss leadership issues together. I know that I would not be where I am today without the help of my mentors. I was told to get out of my office, so I share this with others now.

Sarah was currently a mentor to several people. She was working with both a male and a female, assisting both of them to advance in their careers. Although Sarah thought that personalities have a lot to do with the mentor-mentee relationship, a female-to-female relationship can be exceptionally challenging. She explained,

I think it takes a lot to be a female mentor to a female. I think we are always a bit competitive with each other. Sad to say, but I think that we females are a bit unsure of how to work with the competition between each other. I can't really describe it, but the competition is different with males.

Mary also discussed the issue of females not always supporting each other, saying, "Most women don't support each other, and that's not a good thing. . . . You see males

support each other all the time. They support each other without being jealous. Females need to do so much more of this with each other.” Mary had chosen to address this conflict through mentoring. She knew that without mentors in her life, she would not have accomplished nearly as much. She said,

I’ve made it a point to mentor females regardless of what they look like or how many kids they have or how they dress or whether or not they share my tastes. I think we need to do this. These things shouldn’t matter. It is more about females supporting each other.

Women need mentors along their career pathway, according to Cathy. She was mentoring several women. She emphasized that women cannot wait for mentors to find them; they must go out and find someone who can help them move forward with their careers. She commented,

I think every female needs a female mentor. We need to learn from each other. We need to learn from the mistakes and challenging experiences we face and what happens in our careers as we move one. Why reinvent the wheel, why make the same mistakes again and again? At least if we learn from each other, it plants the seeds for us to move forward.

Being held to different standards than male counterparts. Being the first female president at the college was not something Sarah had really thought about until she saw the announcement in the news stories. She said, “When I first read about me in my new position, I thought, ‘Oh, yes, I guess this is news. I’m the first female president of our institution.’” Even after the initial reaction wore off, comments were again made about the number of women in administrative positions. She shared,

I've just recently had someone tell me that the college is now run by women. I know that is in direct reference to me, but they are probably also noticing more women in leadership roles. We do have a good blend of gender right now with the vice presidents and deans. But sometimes I think it is harder for an older generation to accept these changes.

The issue of clothing choice and style is something several participants commented on. Sarah said that she didn't focus on her femininity, but did carefully consider her clothing choices. For example, she often opted for pants and suits over dresses and skirts. She noted, I think I do tend to dress less feminine than some of my friends. But that is more my nature. I came from a childhood where I cared a lot about what people thought and said about me all the way through high school. When I became an adult I realized that you can't always worry about what other people say and think. . . . So, I am who I am, and I don't tend to think about male or female. But every once in a while I am a woman, and I'll get out my red power suit with a skirt, and that feels good too.

Dress is an issue that Helen also mentioned:

I'm sure the previous president never had people comment on how he looked. And that happens all the time for me. People will say I look great or they love my hairstyle. Maybe they comment on my jewelry or my outfit. I doubt they would do that for a male. I have studied gender dynamics and know that there are differences in how males and females are perceived in their roles. I know that there are gender expectations. I don't think male presidents would be expected to be concerned or empathetic. And there will be some people who say this is not a factor. But I would

differ, when you start peeling back the layers of the onion, you'll see that there are gender expectations buried there.

Differing leadership styles between females and males also becomes very apparent when observing presidents. Male leadership models and organizational structures in higher education can create a difficult environment for women according to Chliwniak (1997), who said, "While men are more concerned with systems and rules, women are more concerned with relations and atmosphere" (p. 2).

Rather than being a traditional, top-down leader, Sarah described herself as a servant leader. This is not an easy leadership style for a woman to apply to her professional life. Sarah stated,

It takes a lot of strength to follow this type of leadership. I enjoy getting coffee for others in the room and pass the plates around when we have food, not because I'm a woman but because I believe in servant leadership. I am here to serve other people, and so I take on this role myself as a leader.

Focusing on the "softer" aspects of leadership is something that Helen admitted she had to remind herself to do. "But," she added,

we still expect women to act like women. And that is a challenge for me because I have worked for so many years in male-dominated fields. I find myself having to pay attention to those softer things because they are really not on my radar any more.

You know if I walk into a room, for the most part, I've never walked into a room where a man is in charge and asked if anyone needed a drink or a cookie, where many women will naturally do that. I forget about that, probably because that is my

personality . . . and that is challenging for me because the expectation is that I will do those types of things simply because I am a women.

Nancy also was the first female president at her institution. That came with its own set of challenges for her. She explained,

One of my board members, who really is wonderful, was very adamant that the college not have a women president. The other board members kind of turned her around and told her to not look at the candidate as male or female, but look at qualifications. So, I did have a unanimous vote. But I also knew that one board member was not looking at me through the eyes of my experience and education, but through the eyes of can *she* do this job. I've also had community members come up to me and say that they are really unsure about the board's selection of a woman for this position. They put it all right out on the table for me.

Nancy still was having community members compare her to her male predecessors. Not only was there a gender difference, but also a wide difference in leadership style. Most often Nancy had chosen to not respond to these comments on gender. If she did respond, she has focused on a particular decision she has made or an action that has been taken. She noted,

If I try to defend my womanhood, I'm not sure that for these people it would make any difference. But I do know that I've had people come up to me and say that they were very skeptical when I came, but now that they've seen what I do, they are really glad I'm here. So I've got feedback from people in the community who think I'm doing what needs to be done, and my board has shown me absolutely great support. I have the best board.

Although Nancy freely admitted that she felt held to different standards than her male predecessors, she laughed and said she had not yet figured out what the standards are—just that they are different. One difference that stood out between Nancy and her male predecessors was management style. She explained,

I'm not the conflict avoider that my male predecessors were. I handle conflict differently. Some people get mad and yell and scream. But the problem is still there and nothing was changed. My accountability is putting out very clear expectations and agreeing to changes. I let people know what the problem is, and we talk about it. I don't like pots boiling and then boiling over.

Nancy also realized that people were still viewing the college in terms of gender. Community members still were making comments on the number of women employed in administrative positions. She said,

I think we are moving in the right direction, but we still have a ways to go. We've still had editorials in the newspaper about the president and her girls, referring to the fact that I have more women on my cabinet. Now if it was reversed, and there were more men with a male president, as was true for many years, we didn't hear about the president and his boys.

Challenges in the first year. Sarah saw her biggest challenge in the first year as president as that she was an internal candidate. Because she was supposed to already know the institution, she did not have six months to a year to get to know everyone. Everyone just assumed that she knew the institution, its culture, and its people very closely. She stated, "I have always been very consistent, very fair, very matter-of-fact and logical. They have

watched me make hard decisions in the past, and so they knew how I would react. That was very important to my success.”

Embracing the use of data was another challenge Sarah faced in her first year. She commented,

Data makes people nervous. But it is the age in which we live. We need to have the data and then use the data. The outside world expects us to look at the data so we can continuously improve. We are in a new normal. We are not the schools we were 5 to 10 years ago. Data can be scary. It can show us some things that aren't as good as we want them to be. And it can show us where we need to improve. But we have to collect data and then use it to make better decisions. This has been a challenge for me with my staff this first year.

Mary defined her biggest challenge of the first year in the presidency as repairing the relationships with the communities her institution serves. She explained,

With all of the mergers, unmergers and remergers, the communities were confused. They had been through so many changes. We had four campuses and not one strategic plan. Each campus was pretty much doing everything on its own. We needed to work together. There was competition among and between all campuses.

Helen also needed to repair relationships with the community her institution serves. Many people in the community were simply not happy with what the institution was offering. Helen's hurdle was to build positive relationships with these people and get them to move forward and make positive changes. She challenged herself to listen to and hear as many voices as possible. She also was reorganizing her cabinet to include more people from a

greater variety of segments of the college and community and task each of them with gathering information to share with her.

Challenges surrounded Nancy in her first year of the presidency. The economy of her community was in recession, the stock market had crashed, and businesses were laying people off from work. Nancy was forced to cut her budgets significantly. Her strategy was to go directly to the community members and gather their input. She said,

I went to the people of the college and people of the community to determine what their priorities were. They wanted to minimize the number of layoffs. They wanted to preserve the quality and excellence of the education provided. And they wanted to serve community and business partners.

Cathy was confronted with personnel challenges in her first year as president. A veteran staff member had a very different perspective of the mission of the institution than Cathy did. She commented,

I think there was a bit of a dance going on between she and I in terms of how we were going to work together. I came in with an understanding that the mission was a technical education mission. I didn't want to exclude strategies that would help our students succeed. My philosophy has been that we need to bring out how we offer our programs and services. That first year I got a lot of responses about we are a technical college so we don't do that. I really didn't care. If we need a writing center, we need a writing center even if we are a technical college. Everyone needs to write. I decided we would have a writing center and a math center. Those are the two most important skills our students will need in the world of work.

Dividing time among multiple campuses was another challenge for Cathy. In addition to overseeing multiple campuses, Cathy also was called on to attend trainings offered by the state. She needed to be very strategic about how and where she spent her time. She explained, “The two campuses would get very jealous of each other if I spent more time at one location than the other. I learned to be very focused and deliberate in these efforts.”

Making choices based on family situations. Although women do have a history of leading institutions of higher education in the United States, they do face their own set of challenges. According to ACE (2007), 63 percent of women presidents were currently married, compared with 89 percent of their male counterparts. In addition, 24 percent of women presidents were either divorced or were never married (excluding members of religious orders), whereas only seven percent of male presidents were counted in these categories. Stubbe (2008) also found in her study that female community college presidents were over five times more likely to be divorced/separated than were their male counterparts.

Women do have unique challenges while moving through their career pathways. According to Mary, women have to make many difficult choices. She said,

I didn't get married until I was 32. So a lot happened early for me. I only focused on myself for 32 years. Once you are married, you have to make sure that your spouse or significant other has the same values and will support you. And you have to make sure you know you can't do everything at once. I see so many young people who think that by the time they are 40 they need to be a president, have 10 kids, and be on every committee in the community. You can't do that. By the time I got married and had a child, I was doing the same job I had been doing for many years.

Mary also talked about women in marriages needing to make choices based on two careers in the family. She herself had a commuter marriage because with her career and her spouse's career, they could not both have employment in the same community. When their child was young, this was difficult on the marriage. When she and her spouse were both eventually able to locate employment in the same community, that eased the parenting workload considerably. Being able to share the demands of parenting was important for her professional development. Mary said that part of the reason for not applying for a president position earlier in her career was due to her family situation, explaining,

I did not interview for many years because I wanted to be home for my child. My husband was traveling all the time and someone needed to be home for my child. I'm glad that I did that. I would do it again. And I would not have forced two parents traveling all the time on him. That was my decision, and it was the best for my family. After my son was in college, then I was free to do some things that I was not able to do when he was a young child.

Eddy (2005) also found in her study that one of her participants indicated that her role as a mother made her advancement to the role of president difficult. This particular participant said that her focus in these years needed to be on the stability of her marriage and her son's home environment.

During her first year as president not only did Nancy have multiple challenges with her new job, her family was still living in their former community, as the family home had not yet sold. She commented,

Moving to a new location was a huge culture change for me and my family. And my family was still in our former location because we couldn't see our house. So we were separated that first year, but we made it through.

Helen delayed her college experience for several years in order to decide what direction she wanted to take. Her plan became to finish college and then marry. When her fiancé graduated and was offered an excellent job quite a distance from their hometown, the couple chose to get married sooner. This meant that Helen would not be able to complete her degree. Helen said, "I just let college go." After working again for several years, Helen had a child. She made the choice to stay at home with her child. Once her child reached school age, Helen returned to college again, dependent on scheduling her classes around being with her child. She said,

By the time my son was in kindergarten, I could get him to school and still do most of my classes during the day. And then I could be back at his school in time to pick him up from kindergarten. So, that is kind of how I organized my life so that I could be a mom and go to school.

Cathy knew that entering the presidency is not an easy choice for many women. On several occasions when she needed to move in order to secure a position to further her career, her family stayed behind. She said,

My husband and I have had to live apart on several occasions. The first years were usually all right with the crazy hours and large workload, but after a couple of years, we decided we really needed to be back together.

Finding a balance between professional and personal life. A personal challenge for Sarah was realizing that she needed to reach outside the college for friendships. She

explained, “I have to be careful because people are always watching if I favor one person over another. Even though I’m not like that, people are always watching. So I established a network of friends outside of the college.”

For Mary to be successful in her role as president, she also needed to take care of herself. Although she readily admitted that this meant to eat healthy and work out more, the most important aspect was to have a life outside of your job. She noted,

You need to have relationships with your family and extended family and friends.

When you go on a vacation, you need to go on vacation. It is important to take time for yourself and relax. You have to realize that you are not perfect and will make mistakes.

Defining success. Sarah defined success in her first year as president as moving forward in a positive direction. She added,

My success has been in listening, learning, and leading. I am enjoying the ride, the journey. Success always goes back to the students. I focus on the rewards we have when we work with our students and help them achieve their goals.

Success to Mary was achieving the goals of repairing the relationships with the communities, re-establishing the organization structure, and developing a strategic plan. She commented, “When these things were accomplished, I knew we were a success.”

Even though Nancy faced multiple challenges in her first year, she viewed this time as a success, saying,

Success was being able to follow through on the priorities staff and community members identified. We did have to lay off a few people. And we retooled some programs to keep people employed. We raised tuition more than I wanted, so there is

always a balance. And the board members were very supportive through the entire time.

Securing multiple grants for her institution was one way Cathy defined success for her first year. Cathy put together a team of individuals who were very deliberate in applying for grants that would truly benefit the institution. When this group received the first grant, they decided to keep applying and have seen multiple successes.

Helen's success depended on the college moving forward and accomplishing the goals they all had chosen. She stated,

I was able to demonstrate to the board that the college was moving in the right direction, things were progressing according to their goals and according to the vision we had worked to establish and develop in our strategic plan. I tend not to mark things and say this is a success. We just keep moving. Just keep moving forward. That is success.

Advice to women advancing in their career pathways. Sarah said she would give the same advice to all women:

My parents told me I could do whatever I wanted to do. So I tell people do what you dream. Don't be afraid to take a risk. But help others, serve others. Put together a team of good people. Then you can all work together and deal with whatever comes your way. If you are not a lifelong learner, you don't belong in education. We are here to help develop people.

Nancy wanted to see females more confident in their ability. One of her biggest challenges was knowing that she could do the job of president. Her mentors really encouraged her and told her to trust in herself. She stated,

I tell women to be confident in your ability. I think that was probably one of the greatest challenges—knowing that I could do the job, whatever the job was, and that I could advance. That is where my mentors have been so helpful. They saw things in me that I didn't see in myself. So, trust yourself. Trust that you can do the job, that next step. And realize that you won't ever know all the answers. So, don't be afraid to say, "I don't know the answer to that." And then work with your team to go find the answer.

Mary's advice to women she was mentoring is that one will not always be liked in this profession. She noted,

A lot of people will not like you when you need to make decisions for your job.

People will not like you or your decisions all the time. And I think this is particularly difficult for women. If you need to be liked and praised all the time, a presidency will be extremely difficult for you.

However, Mary believed that this is becoming a more gender neutral society. She said,

I see some really effective female community college presidents, and I see some really effective male presidents. And I hope that someday it will not matter if you are male or female. What will matter is that you are simply the right person for the job.

Be open to all ideas and take advantage of every opportunity is the advice Helen shared with women advancing in their careers. She elaborated,

Don't lock yourself into a specific career path so much that you are not open to other opportunities that come your way. People came up to me and presented opportunities I had never even thought of. When an opportunity presents itself, take advantage of it. I can't imagine not doing that; that would be awful. I think I've never had one of

those out-of-the blue opportunities that was a bad choice. Because no matter what it is, you're going to come away with something. It may be that you realize this is not for you, that you don't want to do that. But it is still a tool, a learning tool, you still have received experiences you otherwise wouldn't have gotten.

Research Question 4

Research question 4 was: How do female community college presidents describe any voids or deficiencies in their career pathway that made achieving success during their first year more challenging?

Overall, Sarah believed she was prepared for her role as president. One area that she felt lacking in was that of fundraising. She commented, "Fundraising will be my biggest challenge. I don't like asking people for money, but for a good cause I will. I just wish I had more training in this area."

Mary also identified that fundraising was an area for which she had minimal training and wished she had more. Nancy also said one area she wished she had more training in was fundraising. She noted, "Fundraising still was one of those areas I was not confident in. So within the first few months of being a community college president, I went to training for presidents on fund raising. That was very helpful."

These responses remain consistent with past research. Duree (2007) found the first challenge for presidents in the new millennium was that of fundraising. Vaughan and Weisman (1998) also reported that funding was a challenge for presidents.

Additional Findings

Four of the five participants were the oldest child in their family. The participants came from a variety of sibling combinations, however all had younger brothers. The one

participant who was not the oldest, was the youngest with older brothers. However, she immediately said that being the only girl made her feel like the eldest because she was the one called on to care for elderly in the family and her brothers. She was the sibling who assumed much of the responsibility in the family very early in life.

Words of Wisdom from Those Who Have Been There

Finally, the participants shared their words of wisdom for future female community college presidents to guide them along their career pathways:

1. Be optimistic (Sarah, Mary, Nancy, Cathy, Helen);
2. Build relationships (Sarah, Nancy, Cathy, Helen);
3. Be mentored and be a mentor (Sarah, Mary, Nancy, Helen);
4. Walk through every door and take every opportunity (Sarah, Mary, Nancy, Cathy, Helen);
5. Forge ahead; don't wait to be asked (Mary, Nancy, Cathy, Helen);
6. Complete a terminal degree prior to the presidency (Sarah, Cathy, Nancy, Helen);
7. Develop skills in fund raising (Sarah, Mary, Nancy, Helen);
8. Practice leadership skills wherever you are within the institution (Sarah, Mary, Nancy, Cathy);
9. Know yourself and your strengths and use them to your advantage (Sarah, Nancy, Cathy); and
10. Be a continuous, passionate learner (Sarah, Mary, Nancy, Cathy, Helen).

Recommendations for Future Research

This study focused on the lived experiences of five female community college presidents during their first year in that position, and the events in their lives leading up to this position. The intent of this study was not to generalize the findings to a larger population. However, further studies could be conducted to explore other populations of leaders to ascertain commonalities and differences.

For greater understanding of this population for female community college leaders in their first year, a larger number of women meeting similar selection criteria could be studied. A longitudinal study could also be conducted to see if females in subsequent years of their presidency express different narratives. Another variable that could be considered would be females in second positions of presidencies.

One topic of particular interest is that of women not supporting each other in the advancement of their career pathways. Two participants commented on situations in which women were not comfortable supporting each other in comparison to situations in which they had observed males being very supportive of each other. A study focusing on this dynamic between females in top-level administrative positions would be of interest.

Additional questions to be included in future studies:

- How do board members or trustees view gender when interviewing and making choices for a president?
- How do females account for time spent outside of professional careers due to family commitments?

Closing Thoughts

As research continues to expand on the topic of females in the role of presidents in community colleges, a bigger picture emerges. Stories about the pathways to the presidency; training, mentoring and educational opportunities; first-year experiences; and areas with a need for more preparation all contribute to addressing and closing the gap between male and female leaders in the community college system. With more stories and experiences being shared by females in leadership positions, greater numbers of females can be inspired by knowing colleagues and counterparts are finding success in these roles. With depth and breadth of personal narratives, readers can begin to picture themselves in similar situations and realize that they too are capable and competent leaders in their own rights.

Women's voices are becoming more influential in the community college system and, with leadership opportunities on the rise, now is the time for more females to enter into positions of leadership. As I listened to the stories of the participants in this study, I was continually amazed at how life events and circumstances mold and guide individuals more than they realize at the time. By reading and reflecting on stories of other females, I hope that more females will take that step into new and challenging professional roles. The education and training opportunities, both formal and informal, are available for females; however they must take advantage of them. Mentors can be found, and relationships developed to assist along a career pathway.

Nina Sankovitch (2011) reflected about the importance of looking backward while she focused on making meaning in her life after the untimely death of her sister. Sankovitch quoted from the poem "Stepping Backward" by Adrienne Rich: "We live by inches and only sometimes see the full dimension." Sankovitch said that looking backward "allows me to see

the entirety of my present life, of what it took to get me to where I am, and of what I want to have in the life still ahead of me. The big picture, the great perspective. I understand what is important by looking back to see what I remember” (p. 44).

My hope is with this study that many will be able to pause and look backward, and not only in their own lives, but also be able to reflect back with the stories that have been retold here. The messages and lessons learned from each participant can serve as a model to learn from for all readers. For such glances behind can spur one forward with more wisdom than before. As Sankovitch (2011) said, “Past memories, future wisdom” (p. 45).

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